



POWERHOUSE FOR GOD

Sacred Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church

— by Jeff Todd Titon —

American Folklore Recordings

Powerhouse for God

Sacred Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church

Recorded in 1977 and 1978 at the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, Stanley, Virginia,

by Jeff Todd Titon and Kenneth M. George

For five years, Jeff Titon documented the lives and worship services of a Baptist congregation in the Virginia mountains. Working-class men and women, the worshipers preserved much of their ancestors' preindustrial religious folklife. Work, family, and religion are at the center of their lives. At the center of their religion is sacred language, which they invest with the power to change the way things are.

Until now the extraordinary range of sacred speech, chant, and song in the services of an American folk church has not been available on record. *Powerhouse for God* presents not only the worshipers' songs but also their extemporaneous preaching, praying, teaching, and testifying. All of the performances are complete, including a half-hour monologue in which the pastor tells his life story. The accompanying book provides a transcription of the performances, historical background of the church and the community, photographs and a description of the worship service, and an analysis of language in religious practice.

Jeff Todd Titon is associate professor of English and associate professor of music at Tufts University. He is the author of *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (1977), which won an ASCAP Deems Taylor Prize, and he is the record review editor for the *Journal of American Folklore*.

This series presents well-documented recordings of traditional American verbal and musical performances. The general editor for the series is Daniel W. Patterson, chairman of the Curriculum in Folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Primitive Baptist Hymns of the Blue Ridge

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Side 1

1. "Nothing but the Blood" (Lowery). Hymn, led by John Sherfey (3:56).
2. "Meet Me There" (Blair-Kirkpatrick). Hymn, led by John Sherfey (3:38).
3. Altar prayer, led by Jesse Comer (4:05).
4. Sunday school (excerpt), led by Jesse Comer (7:00).
5. Birthday, led by John Sherfey (2:03).
6. "I Shall Not Be Moved" and "This Little Light of Mine" (medley). Special hymn, sung by Denise Sherfey, Tammy Sherfey, and Missy Owens (1:05).
7. "I'm So Glad He Found Me." Special hymn, sung by Betty Cave (lead), Arthur Cave (high tenor), Welford Cave (low tenor), Rosalee Cave (2:20).

Side 2

1. "Preaching by the Roadside." Special hymn, sung after morning services by John Sherfey and Pauline Sherfey (4:26).

2. "The Little Church Aisle." Special hymn, sung on "Bible Way Gospel Time," WRAA radio, Luray, Va., by Belvin Hurt and Delores Hurt Fincham (2:57).
3. "Precious Memories" (Wright). Special hymn, sung by John Sherfey (lead), Elsie Sherfey McNally (alto), and Don Sherfey (bass) (5:04).
4. "I Saw the Face of Jesus." Special hymn, sung on "Bible Way Gospel Time," WRAA radio, Luray, Va., by Betty Cave (lead), Arthur Cave (high tenor), Welford Cave (low tenor), Rosalee Cave (2:28).
5. Healing prayer, led by John Sherfey (2:02).
6. Testimony, spoken by Edith Cubbage (5:12).

Side 3

1. Sermon, invitation, and prayer, by John Sherfey (30:15).

Side 4

1. Life story, spoken by John Sherfey (32:05).

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Daniel W. Patterson, Editor
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If you can keep 'em in church and keep feeding 'em the word of God, preach the gospel, Paul said, "which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: to the Jew first and also to the Greek." So there's power in the word, see? And if people believe that, and live that, you can have a powerhouse for God. But until they believe it, then it's nothing at all. It's just like a mere book.

—Brother John Sherfey, 23 July 1977,
Stanley, Virginia

Introduction

Language and family are the twin themes of this album and its companion book, *Powerhouse for God*.¹ Together the book and album offer highlights from a documentary project in American religious folklife. *Powerhouse for God* is a study of language in the religious practice of an old-time Baptist church in Virginia's northern Blue Ridge Mountains. The members of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church of Stanley, Virginia, proudly call themselves old-fashioned, meaning they practice the religion of their mountain-farming forefathers. Their doctrine falls squarely within what Samuel S. Hill has termed "popular southern Protestantism," the dominant regional religion in the South from 1740 to the present, which traces its beliefs, practice, and emphasis to fundamentalism, frontier revivalism, and, ultimately, the radical wing of the sixteenth-century continental and the seventeenth-century English Protestant reformations.² The heart of this doctrine is that one becomes a Christian by choosing to yield to God and experiencing a new birth, suddenly and totally. Conversion begins with an agonizing spiritual crisis (conviction), during which one feels condemned to hell for one's sins; the new birth results from sincere repentance and a prayer to Jesus for forgiveness.

Certain of the beliefs of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church congregation have special consequences for language in religious practice. Chief among these is the belief that the Christian should be guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit in all things. During worship this spiritual guidance is, ideally, complete. Thus, the distinguishing characteristic of language in religious practice—what, in their view, sets it apart from ordinary language—is that it is wholly led by the Spirit. At

moments of particular intensity, often signaled by a shift from speech to chant, the words are taken to be the direct utterance of God, acting through the indwelling Spirit. The language is understood to have the "power" to change things, and the church itself becomes a powerhouse for God. These moments can occur in extemporaneous prayer, in preaching, or in testimony. When a person prays "in the Spirit," for example, the words are the Lord's own. "It doesn't happen every time that you pray," said Brother Jesse Comer, deacon and Sunday school teacher, "but sometimes you can get on that altar and the Lord'll really bless you. He'll give you words to say as fast as you can say them. And you feel so good about it because you're doing what the Lord wants you to do, what he wants you to say. And they are the needs to be met. And the Lord is blessing you in that prayer. He's leading you, in other words, by the Spirit, the Spirit of God that's in you."³ Preaching in the Spirit is understood to work in the same way: the minister not only delivers God's message but does so in God's words; rather than speak from memory or notes, he extemporizes as the Spirit leads. Sermons, therefore, are always in the prophetic mode, and their content is a combination of lamenting jeremiad and evangelistic gospel.⁴ Testimony—telling what the Lord has done in one's life—is also understood to be God-given, right down to the language of delivery.

The album's focus on language in religious practice opens up a topic in American religion which has previously received little attention from historians and students of religion and theology. Concentrating upon doctrine, religious historians tend to see in southern religion a broad uniformity.⁵ However, consideration of language as it is actually practiced in religious ritual reveals much that is complex, diverse, and challenging. Although a few social scientists have recently published essays and, in a few instances, books that take into account language in religious practice, many of these suffer from inaccurate and incomplete texts, and few employ verbatim transcriptions of the extemporaneous language as it was spoken, chanted, or sung.⁶ Many suffer also from ponderous analysis so far removed from the church members' felt experiences that when the texts are forced to serve scholarly theories instead of being explained by them, the whole structure collapses of its own weight.

This survey of grass-roots Baptist and Pentecostal religion in the United States was begun in 1968. The documentation project that has resulted includes this album, a small number of articles (some written in collaboration with Kenneth M. George),⁷ and my companion book, *Powerhouse for God*. Fascination was my most compelling motive, but increasingly I realized that extensive and high-quality documentation could make a worthwhile contribution. Beyond the documents, I wanted to learn as much as I could about the worshipers' lives, their beliefs, and their own understanding of language in religious practice—and this could not be done merely by catch-as-catch-can field surveying. Accordingly, I selected two churches for in-depth study over a period of years: the New Bethel Baptist Church of Detroit, Michigan,⁸ and the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church of Stanley, Virginia. Preliminary fieldwork on the latter church commenced in 1975, when Ken George visited the church, attended a service, and interviewed the pastor, Brother John Sherfey. In 1976 I did the same. George and I carried out the main part of the fieldwork together during the summer of 1977, when we spent eight weeks with the congregation and their pastor, recording, videotaping, and photographing worship services, radio broadcasts, prayer meetings, and hymn sings. As we became better acquainted with the people, they invited us into their homes for wonderful country meals and conversation, and we recorded their life stories and their beliefs about the world and the church. George and I have continued with follow-up fieldwork in the period since 1977. A list of our tape recordings can be found at the end of this booklet; copies are on deposit at the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and also in the Folklore Archives of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Cultural Geography

Brother John Sherfey is a broadly built man of fifty-seven, with light brown hair, grey eyes, and a methodical manner. For most of his adult life he has been a truck driver and a preacher. Observing him in 1977 and 1978 (when these recordings were made) working in the Rockville, Maryland, oil company shop where he repaired engines when not

driving, one would hardly have taken him for the old-fashioned, hellfire and brimstone preacher and song leader of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, two hours distant in Virginia's northern Blue Ridge. As an experimental scientist working on trucks, he plays hunches, tests, tears down the engine, and stares at it until he has the fouled part in hand. Diagnosis is chancy; the trial-and-error procedure is tedious. But once the broken part is found, the solution is simple: replace it and put the engine back together. Healing broken souls is a different matter. Brother John preaches the Word to the sin-sick soul, but only the sinner can carry through the cure, by confessing sin and asking the Lord to forgive. The preacher's diagnosis is simple and his prescription sure, but salvation is out of his hands; it is a matter directly between the sinner and the Lord.

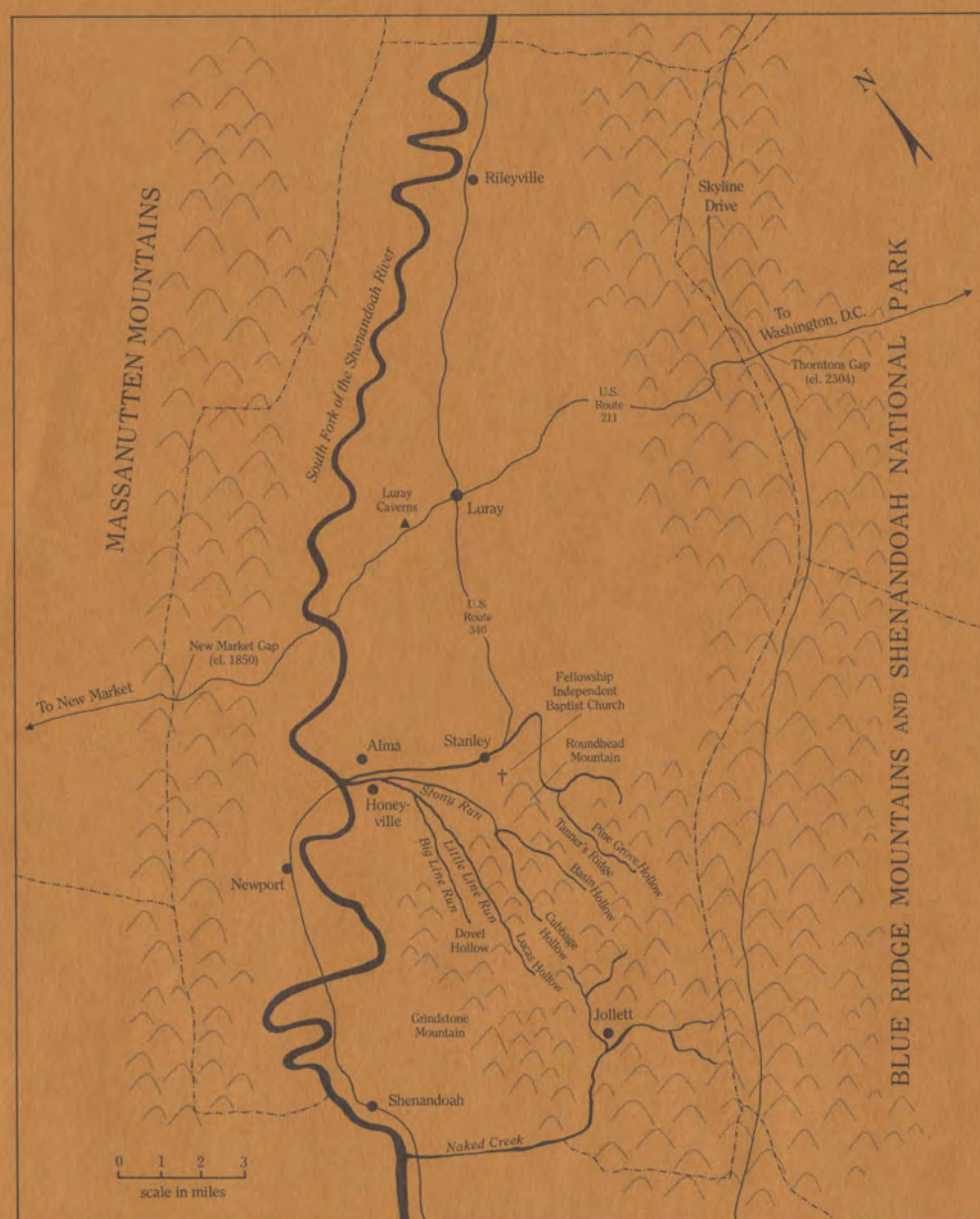
The Fellowship Independent Baptist Church stands at the base of Roundhead Mountain (see map), between the town of Stanley to the west and the mountain ridges and hollows of the Blue Ridge to the south and east. Many of the members of the congregation grew up in these highlands and migrated, early in their adult lives, nearer to the town. The location of the church between mountains and town is also, I believe, symbolic. The town represents the secular world of industry, the economy of consumption, and the temptations of modern life. The mountains represent the sacred sphere of nature, the economy of subsistence farming, and the lost world of childhood and youth—irretrievably lost, as the land is now a part of the Shenandoah National Park. The church, which might mediate between these two worlds, literally turns its back on the town. The members enter and leave through a door which faces the mountains. In the sanctuary the members sit facing the town, but they cannot see it for the preacher in the pulpit, the *Last Supper* tapestry behind him, and the windowless wall behind that.

Mountains, church, and town are part of a larger landscape known as the Massanutten (Shawnee for basket of grain) Valley and a political division known as Page County. This long, narrow geographic region is bounded at the western edge by the Massanutten Mountains and bisected north-south by the South Fork of the Shenandoah River, where Brother John baptizes born-again Christians by total immersion, summer or winter.

"Some say that the Lord will warm the water for them, but that's a lie," he said. "And yet I've dunked them in the dead of winter, and nary a one's fell ill." The Blue Ridge Mountains define the eastern edge of the county.

Brother John and most of the adult members of the church have strong memories of farm life in the old days. Families were large then and worked together closely. The parents knew what was needed to get along in the world—how to keep livestock, cook and sew, grow corn, build and repair barns and homes, mend fences—and they passed these vital skills along to their children. Driving through the Massanutten Valley on the way to the church, one can see how life

has changed in the last fifty years. Of the nearly twenty thousand people who live in Page County, only about four hundred remain full-time farmers.⁹ Mountain farmland in the Blue Ridge was condemned by the state and given to the federal government during Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term of office in order to form the Shenandoah National Park. They say that at the end of Roosevelt's park dedication speech the heavens opened and the most violent thunderstorm within memory poured down upon the crowd of government officials, businessmen, and land speculators, who foresaw, wrongly, a great influx of wealth to the region.¹⁰ The mountain farmers surrendered their land and moved to the valleys below, where



Page County, Virginia.



The soil is good, the land expensive, and the mountains never far from the central Massanutten Valley farms. Near Pine Grove, Virginia, July 1977.

farmland was too expensive for them to buy.¹¹ Some went to the valleys eagerly, trading mountain farm life for the attractions of factory wages and such conveniences as indoor plumbing and electricity in the wood-framed, planked, and weatherboarded houses set on cement foundations near the towns.

Today Page County is a depressed area, with unemployment averaging around 12 percent.¹² The Environmental Protection

Agency has called Page "one of the ten most healthful spots in the United States,"¹³ but the lack of industry forces most county residents to seek employment elsewhere, in the Merck Chemical Plant to the south in Elkton, in the nearby poultry processing plants, or in the Washington, D.C., region, where a good many men from Page find work as carpenters, bricklayers, or unskilled laborers. Although construction work in Washington



Rastus Lam at home in his living room. Stanley, Virginia, July 1977.

means a daily round-trip commute of four hours, the wages are good enough to enable people to buy small, tidy, fully applanched brick ranch houses.

Many of the older people dislike factory work and town life despite its economic advantage, however. Brother Rastus Lam, a member of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church until his death in 1978, began life as a mountain farmer, then worked as a rigger for twenty-five years at Merck Chemical. At age sixty-two, he decided his work at the plant was meaningless, and he quit.¹⁴ In his last decade he returned to farming and hunting, the work and play of his youth. Rather than choose to occupy his time in some hobby, he raised feed corn, vegetables, pigs, and chickens. Ironically, this "subsistence" farming is not economical in a tract home with an acre or two of land. It costs more to keep cows, pigs, and chickens than it does to buy food at the grocery store. But part-time farming as a pastime is typical among the older and retired church members. Perhaps it continues partly because of unvoiced fears of another Depression, but it is also a habit and discipline which, though uneconomical, gives them the pleasure of a job well done and suggests that farming was for them a happier way of life.

The migration of the church members in the 1930s and 1940s from their ridge and hollow farms to town and factory is an old pattern in America, but an apt one to

recall here.¹⁵ In their move from a subsistence farm economy to an industrial wage economy, their chief motives, they said, were curiosity about modern life and the desire for spending money. And cash wages did line their pockets, even if it was quickly given up to the landlords and shopkeepers. They obtained a higher standard of living but at a psychological cost. Strangers now from the earth and the life cycles of plants and animals, alienated from the fruits of their work, and in most instances no longer possessing the vital skills and know-how that their children (now spending most of their years in the public schools) would need for their futures, they saw the strong family bonds nurtured by cooperative farm labor strain and break, and they felt themselves alone. They had improved their standard of living but not the quality of their lives.

Some bought lots on the outskirts of town when they could afford the land and began to construct outbuildings from sawn planks as their fathers had done before them, and there they butchered pigs, kept meat and root vegetables, and grew feed corn for their livestock. Other sons and daughters of mountain farmers joined them. They subdivided the lots and helped build homes there for their own children, just as they had done on the mountain farms in the hollows. In this way part-time farming continued among the older generation, stronger in some

families, weaker in others. More important than farming is the persistence of the farming attitude, and bound up with that is a nostalgia for the good old days when the family farm was a viable institution. Foremost in their memories are their parents, brothers, and sisters. Now feeling themselves exiles, in the modern world but not of it, they recall other self-proclaimed religious exiles, and they think about the old-time religion, with the brush-arbor revivals, itinerant preachers, shape-note gospel hymns, and Spirit-filled atmosphere that promised an answer to the loneliness of suffering, and the separation of death, in the heavenly homecoming reunion of the saved, where families would be together once more. Many remember the promises they made to dying relatives that they would meet again in heaven.¹⁶ Their most fervent hopes are that their mates, sons, and daughters will be saved and follow them; their most desperate fear is that their family and friends will be lost from them forever. The family—on the mountain farm, in the church, and in heaven—serves as the ideal in human relationships: close, hierarchical, strong, dependent, nurturing, delighting, satisfying, loving. Brother John and his congregation seek to preserve that old-time family religion, viewing themselves as a continuing link with that past. The pastor frequently conjures up the old-time religion, contrasting it with the falling-away of the latter days:

I can remember when people used to go to church riding side-saddle. The ladies would ride the side-saddles. Men would ride saddles on their horses. Ride the old buggies, the old hacks, T-model Ford cars, and the old open sides out and everything else. But they'd go for miles and miles. They'd walk through the fields and go to church. The houses would be filled. And the old grandmas would shout, brother! They'd just throw them old bonnets across the house. They had them old long strings on them. And I'd see them things a-slinging around over their heads, you know, and directly here'd go one a-sailing a-this way and one going the other way, and the power of God was all over the place! Now it wasn't in the bonnets, see. And it wasn't in their long dresses. But it was in their heart, see. But now we've got fine automobiles. We got nice pews to sit in. Why, brother, when I started

*going to church, they had them old pews with slats that wide apart. Cracks in them. You'd sit there, and oh, you'd . . . Oh, it was terrible. But now they got good pews to sit. Got good cars to go. Got good heat. Back then, you had the old pot-bellied stoves and throw a chunk of wood in. Sometimes more smoke would come out in the church than went out the chimney. Back then, they worshiped God. But now, you see . . .*¹⁷

The Church

The American roots of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church lie in the Separatist movement in New England during the eighteenth-century Great Awakening, the subsequent migration of evangelical Baptists into the South, and the waves of Baptist and Methodist frontier revivalism during the nineteenth century.¹⁸ A more immediate influence was the evangelical Protestant atmosphere of the highland communities in the southern half of Page County, where, in the twentieth century, small community churches and Sunday school missions ministered to the faithful and to young children. Traveling preachers held meetings in people's homes, using tables and chairs as altars and helping sinners pray through until they were saved.¹⁹ These practices have not altogether ceased even today.

Brother John spent most of his youth and early adult life in eastern Tennessee near Kingsport; he visited the Page community in 1962, shortly after moving to Falls Church, a Washington, D.C., suburb. (A fuller account of his life is available in his own words on side 4 of this album.) His evangelical outlook and mountain farm frame of reference, his powerful, old-fashioned singing and preaching, and his kindness, obvious sincerity, and upright life combined to make a strong impression. He began a monthly preaching appointment at the Stanley Freewill Baptist Church, and in 1967 he was elected pastor of the Comertown Freewill Baptist Church, an unusual tribute for one who spent his workaday life near the capital and could afford to come into Page only one or two days each week. On 5 March 1971 he and nineteen followers left the Comertown church to establish the Fellowship Freewill Baptist Church in Stanley, where they rented the old Graves



Ridge and valley farmland in southern Page County, near Lucas Hollow. April 1978.

Methodist Chapel for Sunday worship services. On 14 January 1972 they ceased affiliation with the Freewill Baptist denomination and renamed themselves the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church. Independence gained them ten new members. They planned and built with their own labor the church structure at the base of Roundhead Mountain, a mile to the east of Stanley, where they have worshiped since the summer of 1973. By the spring of 1979 the congregation had grown to forty, and they voted to support Brother John full-time in the ministry, enabling him to resign from his oil company job and move from Falls Church to a trailer next to the church in Stanley. In the summer of 1980, Brother John's activity in the Page community had gained a dozen members more for the congregation, and that number seemed likely to grow.²⁰

As its name implies, the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church is independent of any Baptist association or convention, but as Baptists, they of course hold beliefs consistent with many other Baptist groups. Like other Protestants, they recognize the authority of the Bible, rather than pope, canon law, or church, as the guide to faith and daily life; they affirm a universal priesthood of believers, denying a monopoly to priests in ministering between God and man; they hold that Christians are saved by grace through faith,



Rear view of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church house of worship. Roundhead Mountain is in the background. April 1978.

rather than through works and sacraments; and they provide many outlets for lay participation in the worship service, particularly through hymn singing. Like other fundamentalist Baptists, they believe that the Bible was divinely inspired and therefore is literally true; they hold that the true church consists only of people mature enough to have undergone conversion and baptism; they affirm that each Christian congregation is a true church, with Jesus at its head, and is therefore autonomous and not subject to rules of an ecclesiastical hierarchy.²¹ In fact, their break with the Freewill Baptist denomination was not over doctrinal differences but, as Brother John explained,

because they did not want to conform to the regulations of their district's Freewill Baptist association, send delegates to their conventions, pay a percentage of their offering to support the central administration, or involve themselves in association projects or politics.²²

In belief and practice, then, the church feels its closest kinship with the Freewill Baptists, a denomination founded in Maine in 1780 by Benjamin Randall. Randall reported that in his conversion experience he had been impressed with God's "universal love, universal atonement, a universal call to mankind, and was confident that none would ever perish but those who refused to obey it."²³ The Freewills struck out against the prevailing Calvinism, with its insistence that atonement was limited to a predestined number of God's elect.

Never a very large denomination, they had better success in the South than the North during the next two centuries, taking part in the frontier evangelism of the camp meetings and, later, the brush-arbor revivals. In 1911 the Northeastern churches were absorbed by the American Baptist Convention; most Baptists had by this time given up the doctrine of limited atonement and agreed with the Freewills' basic tenet. In the South, however, and certain parts of the Midwest, the Freewills maintained their identity and joined in the National Association of Freewill Baptists.

In common with the Freewills, then, the church holds the doctrine of universal atonement, that salvation is open to all; they practice open communion, offering it to all who are satisfied with their baptism, whether in infancy, or not by immersion, or outside the Baptist church; they believe that, once converted, a Christian can (and does) fall from the state of grace, and that to be restored he must sincerely repent of his sin and ask forgiveness of Jesus; they hold that man's will is free to yield or not yield to God and accept or not accept the offer of pardon and eternal life through Jesus; they affirm that while every mortal will sin, it is for his own sin and not Adam's transgression that a man will be punished in hell eternally; and on the authority of John 13 they practice foot washing during communion as an ordinance of Christ (a practice abandoned by the New England Freewills in the 1830s).²⁴

In addition to this doctrine, which they hold in common with other Protestants, other Baptists, and Freewill Baptists, the

members of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church emphasize a small number of other principles which apply to their congregation and may be understood as rules of their church. They affirm that their ministers must be male (on the authority of 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence") and preach from the King James Version of the Bible; they believe that ministers are called by God and may be ordained through prayer and the laying on of hands; they forbid eating in the church (on the authority of 1 Corinthians 11:22 and 1 Corinthians 11:34); and they practice river baptism by total immersion, after the example of Jesus and John the Baptist.²⁵ Moreover, they are millennialist, believing in the imminent Second Coming of Christ who will inaugurate a thousand-year rule of peace and happiness on earth before the last days; and they practice a healing prayer (on the authority of James 5:14–15) during the Sunday morning worship service. Millennialism and the healing prayer are more characteristic of contemporary Pentecostals than Baptists, but that does not perturb Brother John and his flock, who identify themselves as Christians first and Baptists second. In fact, this church indulges in very little denominational wrangling, as Brother John proclaims that a person can be saved as a Baptist, one of the Brethren, a Pentecostal, a Methodist, a Mennonite—and he seldom gets much further along the list, but it is clear that a person need not be a Baptist to be saved. In the words of Deacon Vernie Meadows, "The Lord got ahold of me before the Baptists did."²⁶

In this fashion, the church conforms to the broad doctrinal course of Southern fundamentalist evangelical Protestantism. But within that Protestantism the various denominations and individual congregations show important distinctions. Differences in language in religious practice, and the beliefs that support them, reveal themselves to any researcher who undertakes a systematic field study. The most apparent concern orality: in some congregations testimony (if there is any), prayers, and sermons are written or rehearsed beforehand and delivered from a piece of paper or memory, while in others, such as the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, they are composed at the moment of performance and delivered in a speech mode which shifts with emotional intensity from speaking to chanting (and, in

some instances, singing). This latter mode is understood to signal Spirit-led, power-filled language, capable of effecting change in people's lives. Of course, other important distinctions, such as geography, race, education, status, wealth, and political influence, are also present in the various denominations and individual congregations. Some have strong ties to the social, economic, educational, and political establishments in their communities, while others, such as the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, exist outside these establishments and are less worldly.

Indeed, this congregation quite consciously stands apart from the world. Most Americans, after all, accept the scientific rather than the biblical view of the universe, and they strive for wealth, power, success, and happiness in this world, hoping that the next will take care of itself. Many attend church out of habit and the desire to set a public example, not because of deep spiritual feelings. Acute piety, Americans think, is eccentric, crippling, unhealthy; much more rewarding for them is a faith in the American dream of success. The most visible fundamentalists, the crusading television evangelists, take pains to present themselves as people who are clean of mind, healthy of body, courageous, decisive, and, above all, efficient. In so doing they resemble nothing so much as successful businessmen (which, of course, many of them are). Meanwhile, contemporary theologians have redefined faith as "ultimate concern" instead of belief, and in proclaiming the "death of God," they have seemingly shut religion off from its traditional sources.²⁷

In these modern times, Brother John and his congregation believe, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the church from the world. Baptismal pools behind the pulpit have taken over from river baptism. People eat, drink, and play games in the church; in fact, many "play" church as though religion itself were a kind of game. In some worship services the freedom of the Spirit is regulated by a printed program, pre-selected hymns and prayers, and a time limit permitting families to return home just as the Sunday dinner is ready to come out of the oven. Emotional display in church is thought unseemly. Pastors neglect the Word of God and preach topical lectures on social adjustment. They take care not to offend, lest they lose members, financial support, and community influ-

ence. Brother John believes that against these worldly trends he stands for the Word of God and says he "does not cut corners for anybody." He and his church members proclaim that their God is still alive, and that Satan is a real and constant antagonist. Their worship services are very intense, emotion and Spirit filled, with shouts of glory and tears of joy. They believe in being led by the indwelling Spirit in all things, whether in church, at home, or on the job. They view history as a battleground between God and the devil, and they stand as living witnesses in the Christian army, looking forward to the ultimate victory of the church.

Led by the Spirit, Brother John preaches extemporaneously from an open Bible; he does not write his sermons out, bring notes to the pulpit, or memorize in advance what will be said. He has had no seminary training. "A preacher is called from God, sent by God," he said, "and if God called me, God can preach me."²⁸ His syntax here reflects his belief that God preaches *through* him. His—or the Lord's—sermons always start from close exegeses of the King James Bible, and the messages always are evangelistic. "If you've got nothing to wear but overalls and brogan shoes," he said, calling on symbols of the poor, old-fashioned farmer, "you'll still be welcome at our church."²⁹

The Recordings

Activities at the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church are concerned exclusively with worship. Weekly services take place on Sunday mornings and Sunday nights. There is a prayer meeting every Tuesday night and a hymn sing on the second Saturday night of each month. Communion, with foot-washing, is held at Easter and infrequently throughout the rest of the year. Baptismal services take place on request. In August the annual homecoming service, with dinner on the grounds, brings back friends and relatives who have moved away from the community. Homecoming is an especially powerful time, as the assembled group looks forward to the heavenly reunion, a counterpart of the earthly ceremony.

The first three sides of this album offer examples of hymnody, prayer, Sunday school teaching, preaching, and testimony—the genres of language in religious practice which a Sunday visitor to

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Congregational hymn singing
Prayer requests and altar prayer
Scripture reading
Sunday school
Bible count
Birthdays
Offering, prayer, and hymn
Special-hymn singing
Healing prayer
Sermon
Altar call (invitation), prayer, and hymn
Prayer
Testimony
Closing prayer

Normal order of worship, Sunday morning services, Fellowship Independent Baptist Church.

the church would hear. (On the fourth side of the album, Brother John tells his life story.) Sunday morning visitors are welcomed at the door by Brother John and his wife, Sister Pauline, and, once inside, by members of the congregation, many of whom come forward, smiling, introducing themselves, and shaking hands.

Congregational Hymn Singing

The morning service begins at ten o'clock with from three to five hymns (for example, side 1, bands 1 and 2). The congregation sings them without accompaniment, and there is no choir. The songs are led from the pulpit, usually by Brother John, but sometimes by his son Donny. Just before their performance, the hymns to be sung are selected by the song leader or by individuals in the congregation who call out the page numbers from their *Church Hymnal*.³⁰ The members of the congregation are seated at their pews during the singing; the leader stands, marking the beat with up-and-down arm movements.

Most of the hymns are of the type known as "gospel hymns." These use folk and popular tunes, stanzas that alternate with refrains or choruses, and lyrics, often in the first person, that focus upon the joys of salvation. "Meet Me There" (side 1, band 2) is typical; its poetic diction is at odds with its simple tune, but it is effective nonetheless, particularly in the chorus, with its antiphonal call-and-response, climaxing on the word *there*

(heaven) at the highest peak of the melodic curve. Brother John booms the song out, leading with tremendous vocal power; indeed, the ability to sing loudly is much admired.

Most gospel hymns were composed in the United States during the past one hundred years, and they have been especially popular among evangelical Protestants. Other favorites of the church include "Fill My Way with Love," "An Old Account Settled," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "I Will Never Turn Back," "When God Dips His Love into My Heart," "The Great Reaping Day," and "I'll Fly Away," the titles suggesting the lyrics' emphasis on the joys of salvation.³¹ The lyrics of "Meet Me There," like many other gospel hymns, put the singers in mind of the heavenly homecoming reunion. "Singing is the start of a good service," Brother Rastus Lam said. "Sing a few pieces, and that kind of gives a man, kind of builds him up in the Lord."³²

Most people in the congregation are literate and, if they have not memorized the words, read them from the hymnal; but no one can sightread the tunes from the hymnal notation, so they rely on memory or catch the tunes from Brother John, who has them from oral tradition. The singing is mostly monophonic, but in some of the slower hymns, such as "Nothing but the Blood" (side 1, band 1), some members of the congregation "keep harmony" by ear.

Side 1, band 1.

"*Nothing but the Blood.*" JOHN SHERFEY (speaks): Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is a wonderful song. You don't hear it sung much anymore. Somebody, I believe Brother Roberts, said Sunday night, they're trying to do away with the blood in the songbooks. They'd like to take it out of the Bible. But we can stand for the Word of God, and certainly the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. LOIS THOMAS (speaks): Amen. ALL SING, LED BY JOHN SHERFEY:

*What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is thy flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*For my pardon this I see
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Nothing but the Blood as sung by John Sherfeey

$\text{♩} = 72$ actual key: Eb

What can wash a- way my sin? Noth-ing but the blood of Je- sus.

What can make me whole a- gain? Noth-ing but the blood of Je- sus.

Oh pre- cious is thy flow- that makes me white as snow.

No oth- er fount I know. Noth-ing but the blood of Je- sus.

For my cleansing this my plea
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is thy flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Nought of good that I have done
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is thy flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This is all my hope and peace
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
This is all my righteousness
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Side 1, band 2.

"Meet Me There." DON SHERFEY: Anyone got a selection? JOHN SHERFEY (strums guitar). GOLDIE DOVE: 256. DON SHERFEY: 256? [Shuffling of hymn-books]. You have to lead that one, Dad. I don't even know it. "Meet Me There"? JOHN SHERFEY (strums guitar, whispers): Think that starts out pretty low, too. I believe that's in D [strums D chord]. [Louder] 256. ALL SING, LED BY JOHN SHERFEY:

On the happy golden shore where the faithful part no more,
Where the storms of life are o'er, meet me there.
Where the night dissolves away into pure and perfect day,
I am going home to stay, meet me there.

Meet me there (meet me there), meet

me there (meet me there),
Where the tree of life is blooming,
meet me there.
When the storms of life are o'er, on that happy golden shore
Where the faithful part no more,
meet me there.

Here our fondest hopes are vain,
dearest links are rent in twain,
But in heaven no throb of pain, meet me there.

By the river sparkling bright, in the city of delight

Where our faith is lost in sight, meet me there.

Meet me there (meet me there), meet me there (meet me there),
Where the tree of life is blooming,
meet me there.
When the storms of life are o'er, on that happy golden shore
Where the faithful part no more,
meet me there.

Where the harps of angels ring, and the blest forever sing,
In the palace of the king, meet me there.

Where in sweet communion blend heart with heart and friend with friend,

In a world that ne'er shall end, meet me there.

Meet me there (meet me there), meet me there (meet me there),
Where the tree of life is blooming,
meet me there.
When the storms of life are o'er, on that happy golden shore,
Where the faithful part no more,
meet me there.

Altar Prayer

After the hymns the morning service continues with prayer requests and the altar prayer. Individuals in the congregation speak from their pews, if they wish, one at a time, requesting prayer for themselves and others. The following is an example of a prayer request:

*Let's remember Oscar Lucas. He's in right bad shape, and let's just pray that he'll get saved before it's too late. He's in critical shape, his mother said. And let's just pray for them, too, that they'll get saved. From this if nothing else—it might be for that, you know. 'Cause they're unconcerned and not bothered, and these things come up, and sometimes, I think, God's got a purpose in things like this. And I've got children that's lost and I want you all to pray for them.*³³

After the prayer requests, many gather at the altar, while some remain at their seats. All kneel, many with hand over face, and pray their individual prayers all at once, extemporaneously and aloud (side 1, band 3). As the prayer builds in speed and intensity several people shift from speaking their prayers to chanting or singing them. Praying individual prayers aloud and simultaneously was an often-reported feature of early-nineteenth-century camp meetings.³⁴ The practice is particularly common today among Pentecostals, but not at the altar. "The altar prayer," Brother John said, "is the

backbone of the church. The altar prayer. You get everybody around the altar and get 'em to praying, then things will happen."³⁵ Brother Jesse Comer explained that "the purpose of prayer is you talking directly with your Lord. In other words as a child we ask our father or our mother and ask them whether we can do something or ask them to give us something. . . . And I must believe in what I ask by faith if I want to see that prayer answered."³⁶ The members of the church family petition their Father in heaven, praying as the Spirit moves them. The altar prayer is over when the last person finishes.

Side 1, band 3.

Altar prayer. DON SHERFEY: (speaks) Everyone that can and will, gather round the altar at this time and we'll have prayer. Believe I'll ask brother Jesse to lead us in prayer. ALL PRAY AT ONCE. [Prayer not transcribed.]

Sunday School

Scripture reading follows the altar prayer. One of the members of the congregation stands at his or her pew and reads a brief passage from the King James Bible. The reader selects the passage; it bears no direct relationship to the sermon or the Sunday school lesson. Sunday school follows the Scripture reading. The children go to the church basement, where their classes are led by one or two of the adults, while the rest of the adults remain in the



Altar prayer. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, July 1977.



Adult Sunday school, led by Jesse Comer (standing). Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, April 1978.

sanctuary for the adult class, led by Brother Jesse Comer (excerpt, side 1, bend 4).

He teaches directly from the Bible, without the study books supplied by the denominations. "I feel like adults ought to be able to take the word of God as it comes along," he said. "Using the Bible you can go straight through it, and you get it all, where[as] they leave so many things out using literature." The class goes over the Scripture chapter by chapter. "I feel like that in Sunday school we ought to be able to learn one from another,"³⁷ Brother Jesse went on.

Sometimes members disagree on the meaning and application of the verses under discussion, but they are usually able to reach a consensus through democratic discussion. In this way, they resolve conflicts that touch their lives more personally than anything in the study literature could. (The discussion of the qualifications of wives of deacons on side 1, band 4, is typical of this procedure.)

Like preaching, teaching is regarded as a spiritual gift, and the Spirit is understood to guide the utterances of the Christian adults as they interpret the Bible. But teaching is the least intense form of language in religious practice; usually, it is given simply as conversation or lecture. In fact, the church members regard the

evangelist ministers who speak their sermons on network television mostly as teachers, not preachers. Brother John, on the other hand, is neither conversing nor lecturing when he gets "carried away" and begins to chant his sermons (for example, side 3)—the sign of a superior spiritual anointment.³⁸

Side 1, band 4.

Sunday school excerpt (all speaking).

JESSE COMER: Eleventh. "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" [Timothy 3:11, on the qualifications of wives of deacons]. Now how do you see that one? LOIS THOMAS: I think the wife should have the same quality as the husbands as deacons. JESSE COMER: Well, they don't have all the qualifications but they do have some of them. We see that they must be honest, and must also be boldly to speak out for the Lord. CLYDE CUBBAGE: If you're honest, though, brother you'll pay your tithes. JESSE COMER: Well, yes, speaking on the tithes, I'd say you would do your best to. I'm like Brother John; and now sometimes it takes a lot of faith to start into that. I'm not making any excuses. But it says here on the wives, "not slanderous, sober"—we know that even all of us must be this if it's talking about sober far as drinking is concerned—and "faithful in

all things." LOIS THOMAS: I believe it means pure and godly, is what that *sober* means. JESSE COMER: Could be. JOHN SHERFEY: I think what they mean there too is sober minded. In other words, you know, have a clear mind and not be drawn away with every enticement. That'd be sober minded. JESSE COMER: Could be both. Did you know you got more, if I'm not mistaken, women alcoholics in the world today, really, than you've got men? But a lot of them are at home, and you don't know about it. Is there anybody else maybe would have something on that? ELLA TURNER: I believe the wife it says of the deacon and I just believe they's supposed to be as perfect as a deacon is, and go along with him, agreeing with him, and help him, and talk things over to go with people that, bring people to the Lord. JESSE COMER: Well, I believe — ELLA TURNER: 'Cause if not — JESSE COMER: I believe that they ought to go along with their husbands, true. ELLA TURNER: That's right. JESSE COMER: If they can get 'em to. I have to use my own case in this; I can't say anything about anyone else. My wife has laid out of church until I don't know whether she has a desire to come back anymore. She's been sick for a long time, but there's been times that she could come with me and didn't do it. Now you look at it from this standpoint: I cannot make her come. ELLA TURNER: That's right, you can't count — JESSE COMER: Now what are we to do about something like this? ELLA TURNER: You can't help that. LOIS THOMAS: Well if she's sick, you shouldn't expect her to come. JESSE COMER: I don't believe in bringing up someone else on this, but I'll just use myself. LOIS THOMAS: Well, but first of all, really I wonder if you should have been voted in as having the deacon's office. I mean by your wife not having desire to be in church and everything. I mean I don't know what your wife is, but if she's slanderous, somebody that meddles into the affairs of people and everything or whether she says anything or not, but really this qualification is supposed to be met by anyone who is voted in as deacon. JESSE COMER: Well [light laugh], that's a hard thing to say. I believe I don't remember whether my wife was coming or not when I took the deaconship here at the church. But certainly I have no power over making the other one do [cry of infant] what I want 'em to do. As long as she treats me right and I'm the head of the household—and I still am—at home, not

to brag, but I believe the man ought to be. And I still, I don't mean that I'm a boss, or something like that. We talk things over and try and do things in the right way. But far as coming to church and living a Christian life, you can't force this upon anyone. LOIS THOMAS: No, but I believe that faith can move mountains, and if we'd step out and exercise faith and do what God wants us to, we'd see God do blessings for us. We can have those things which we desire to have. JESSE COMER: Well, I'm hoping so. RASTUS LAM: Brother Jesse, my wife's the same way. JESSE COMER: Right. And this is — RASTUS LAM: Claims she has neuritis and stays out of church a lot, and I never come not unless I ask her to come. But I'm like you; I think she could come a lot of times when she don't come. JESSE COMER: Mm-hmm. RASTUS LAM: Just as well be honest about it 'cause the Lord knows all about it. [Murmurs of Amen.] JESSE COMER: No excuses for it. ELLA TURNER: Well, I don't think the Lord would hold you responsible for it because you do as you was talking, and they just want to stay themselves. JESSE COMER: I know the Lord's not holding me responsible for what she's doing — ELLA TURNER: That's right. JESSE COMER: Every person has to answer for their own self. But this is something that we can, that we think about when you take something like this, whether it would keep you from taking office in the church. Certainly I wouldn't want my wife to be a slanderer. I know Brother Rastus wouldn't. And I'd want her to be sober minded, and certainly sober, not drinking. And I wouldn't allow that in the house. I've had one drink poured in my house since I've been a Christian, as I know of, and that was my brother. I was gone at the time. He walked in and he was drinking and he was about half [laughter]. I walked in the front door, and there he was sitting at the bar and had a beer in his hand. I didn't have to say anything but I just gave him a real hard look and he got up and walked out, and he's never brought one back over to the place since then. He's respected me. But while he's got something in him, sometimes people forget. But he knows where I stand and he knows how I feel. LOIS THOMAS: But you brought it up that you didn't leave your tithes, and I believe really if you'd step out on faith and give to God what is his, you can expect God to bring your wife and your children into the church where you've been praying about. JESSE COMER: Well,



Special-hymn singing by Donny and Denise Sherfey. WRAA studios, Luray, Virginia, July 1977.

I'm still believing in that. LOIS THOMAS: I mean we have to exercise faith though for the Lord to move. I mean we just don't get it. You start stepping out and taking the promises of God and believe in him for it and do what he says and then expect him to give blessings in place of it. JESSE COMER: I'm still hoping that, I'm still praying on that. ROY STEVEN CUBBAGE: Well, Brother Jesse, we've all got stumbling blocks, but we've got to just pray about the things, and sometimes that stumbling block will move in a year or two years. And I feel like that a person should pray about these things. JESSE COMER: Right. All right, look at the twelfth verse there . . .

Birthday Song

During the Sunday school, which usually lasts for about forty minutes, a few latecomers enter the church and sit at the rear; when classes are dismissed, they move closer to the pulpit. At this time all return to the sanctuary, and Brother Don Sherfey, in the pulpit, asks everyone who has brought a Bible that week to hold it up. The number is counted and compared with that of the previous week. Brother Don then asks if anyone has had a birthday during the week; if so, the congregation sings "Happy Birthday" (side 1, band 5). On the album selection Brother John instead asks for birthdays because he knows that Brother Don and Don's daughter Denise have both celebrated them that week. After the birthday song, Brother Don asks the ushers to come forward to take up the morning offering, and he asks someone, by name, from the congregation

to give an extemporaneous prayer of thanks for it. The ushers go down the aisle with the collection plates while the congregation sings the offering song, usually "Amazing Grace," because everyone knows the words and this leaves the hands free for passing the plate and readying contributions.

Side 1, band 5.

Birthday. JOHN SHERFEY: I'm going to ask for birthdays this morning before we go any farther. I want to find out how many birthdays we've had this week. And this being the twenty-fourth, I know I know one. He cannot hide; he can't slip out of it. [Laughs.] And I know that. So now we're going to get his money this morning. He's been a-standing here getting everybody else's. We're going to work on him this morning. Did anybody have a birthday? [Don and Denise Sherfey step to pulpit.] [To Denise] Hi honey. How are you? Amen, all right. I got your pin right in here. Let's put your pin on you, hon. There you are. [To Don] Hi, young man. DON SHERFEY: Eighteen years old. JOHN SHERFEY: [Laughs.] Oh yeah?³⁹ [To congregation] Would you believe he used to weigh 280 pounds? He don't quite weigh that now; 219 is what he weighs. He's really went down. All right, let us sing happy birthday, will you? ALL SING:

*Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, God bless you, happy birthday to you.
May God bless you, may God bless you,
May God bless Donny and Denise,
may God bless you.*

JOHN SHERFEY: That's father and daughter. Amen; all right . . .

Special-Hymn Singing

The special-hymn singing (side 1, bands 6 and 7; side 2, bands 1, 2, 3, and 4) follows the offering in the order of worship. Brother Don Sherfey asks whether anyone wants to sing "specials," and individuals in the congregation, duets, trios, quartets, and so forth—usually family groups—come to the pulpit and sing. The Caves, Hurts, and Sherfeys, who sing on this album, do not consider themselves professional singers, yet their singing is widely admired in the religious community, and they sing on the religious radio broadcasts on Sunday afternoons over local station WRAA in Luray.

Style. The Caves, Hurts, and Sherfeys sing in a manner typical of the central region of the Southern Appalachians, where John, John's sister Elsie, and Pauline Sherfey were born and raised. This region includes the mountain areas of northeastern Tennessee, southwestern Virginia, northwestern North Carolina, and southeastern Kentucky. It is easier to recognize this "mountain" vocal style than to describe it. The sound is produced from a light, narrow throat, rather than from the chest with a wide, heavy throat. The result is a voice that is markedly free from vibrato and resonance and has the characteristically flat and nasal mountain sound. Without vibrato, the smooth timbres blend so well in harmony singing that when the voices are in rhythmic unison, it is difficult to tell how many voices are singing. It is a close community of sound in which the individual subordinates his voice to the sound of the group. The principal harmony is from above, usually in thirds. Other intervals are fifths, fourths, and octaves. Cadential harmonies seldom deviate from root-third-fifth or an inversion of it. The singers attack the tones with a variety of glides, some of which are quite slow and occupy almost half the pitch's durational value.

These vocal characteristics, which, incidentally, also typify traditional bluegrass singing, are a marked contrast to the singing style of professional southern gospel quartets, such as the Blackwood Brothers, the Oak Ridge Boys, and the Stamps Quartet, which have national rather than regional audiences. The differences are easily heard, for these professional quartets sing with "trained" voices, wide vibrato, individualized timbres, cadences which include sevenths, and chromatically harmonized melodies. An essential ingredient is the bass voice, which is given considerable harmonic movement and, at times, the melodic lead. These differences between "mountain" and "trained" voices have been noted by mountain singers, such as Buell Kazee, who have later undertaken voice training.⁴⁰

Repertoire. The Caves, Hurts, and Sherfeys learn most of their songs by ear from popular gospel records, which they hear on radio or on record or tape. They memorize the melodies and copy the words into loose-leaf or spiral-bound notebooks, which they read from when singing at home, in the church, or in the

radio station studio. Such songs as "I'm So Glad He Found Me," "I Saw the Face of Jesus," and "The Little Church Aisle" (side 1, band 7; side 2, bands 4 and 2) now circulate orally in Page County, as well as in recorded versions by such favorite gospel-singing groups as the Singing Cookes and the Good News Quartet.

Other songs in their repertoires include well-known traditional gospel favorites, such as "Precious Memories" (side 2, band 3), and relatively obscure ones, such as "Preaching by the Roadside" (side 2, band 1). The Sherfeys learned the latter hymn from repeated listenings to Henry Barker and his wife at the State Line Mission, near Kingsport, Tennessee, in the early 1950s.⁴¹

Typically, the Caves, Hurts, and Sherfeys borrow the words and melodies, but make their own harmonies. The Hurts usually sing in octaves; Sister Delores's sharp tone is featured and much admired, though, of course, they would insist that the message of the lyrics is most important. The Caves' harmonies are close and delicate, with no low bass or baritone part to add "bottom" to the sound. The Sherfeys sing in various family combinations. Brother John's voice is husky, powerful, and true to pitch; his glides, catches, and grace-note decorations mark him as sharing in a traditional mountain singing style that has its roots in the British Isles. The harmonic effect of John and Pauline's singing is quite striking, as may be heard on "Preaching by the Roadside" (side 2, band 1), with its open half-cadences. The singers prefer instrumental accompaniment, but since none of them plays an instrument, they usually sing unaccompanied.⁴²

The medley of camp-meeting songs, "I Shall Not Be Moved" and "This Little Light of Mine" (side 1, band 6), is regularly sung by the Sherfey grandchildren and Missy Owens at the beginning of the special-hymn singing. The children enjoy performing, and the adults are pleased to see the religious foundations being laid in the youngest generation.

Everyone who wants to sing is given a chance, and the special-hymn singing lasts for twenty to thirty minutes. The members of the congregation remain seated at their pews, listening to the music, occasionally shouting "Glory" or "Hallelujah" as the Spirit moves them when a particular lyric strikes home. The singers often give brief testimonies before or after singing. Brother John, in his role as in-



Special-hymn singing by (l. – r.) Welford Cave, Rosalee Cave, Arthur Cave, Betty Cave. WRAA studios, Luray, Virginia, July 1977.

terpreter, frequently comments on the meaning of the songs. Speaking about “the great reunion day” (just before the singing of “Precious Memories,” side 2, band 4), he makes explicit the connection between the earthly and heavenly homecoming, and he gets a shouting response from the congregation. (Compare his comments before “Nothing but the Blood,” side 1, band 1.)

Side 1, band 6.

“I Shall Not Be Moved” and “This Little Light of Mine.” JOHN SHERFEY: Who’s going to be the first to sing this morning? Here comes the little girls. You pray for them as they come to sing. DENISE SHERFEY, TAMMY SHERFEY, AND MISSY OWENS SING:

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine,

Let it shine, let it shine.

*I shall not be, I shall not be moved,
I shall not be, I shall not be moved,
Just like the tree that’s rocking by the waters*

I shall not be moved.

JOHN SHERFEY: Amen. Bless you children. Thank the Lord.

Side 1, band 7.

“I’m So Glad He Found Me.” BETTY CAVE, ARTHUR CAVE, WELFORD CAVE, ROSALEE CAVE SING:

[Betty]

*I was on the mountain, wandering
from the fountain,
When I heard my Saviour speak to me.
He said, “Come to me relenting and of
your sins repenting,
And I will lead you out where you can
see.”*

[All]

*And I’m so glad he found me. In love he
bound me,
Put his arms around me.
He led me to the shelter, and now I’m one
of his own.
And o those joys of knowing, with hearts
all glowing,
Someday I’m going to my home, my
home in glory,
And I’ll walk the streets of pure gold.*

[Betty]

*Now I will love him ever, O I’ll stray
from him no never.
He’s the dearest friend I’ve ever knew.
And when I see him yonder, my love
it’ll still grow fonder,
In that happy land beyond the blue.*

[All]

*And I’m so glad he found me. In love
he bound me,
Put his arms around me.
He led me to the shelter, and now I’m
one of his own.
And o those joys of knowing, with
hearts all glowing,
Someday I’m going to my home, my
home in glory,
And I’ll walk the streets of pure gold.*

Side 2, band 1.

“Preaching by the Roadside.” JOHN SHERFEY AND PAULINE SHERFEY SING:

*Preaching by the roadside, under a
tree,
Folks come along and make a mock of
me.
They say we’re crazy, soon we’ll meet
our fate;
But now we’ve churches in every state.*

*Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me,
You’ll find me, yes, you’ll find me.
Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me
Singing and shouting in eternity.*

*Some folks won’t own us, turn us
away,
Would give all this world just to hear
Jesus say
You have been good and faithful too
So come right on in there’s a mansion
for you.*

*Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me,
You’ll find me, yes, you’ll find me.
Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me
Singing and shouting in eternity.*

*While I am resting beneath the sun,
My home is ready [at] the right hand of
God.
The angels are holding my robe and
crown,
While Gabriel is ready trumpet to
sound.*

*Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me,
You’ll find me, yes, you’ll find me.
Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me
Singing and shouting in eternity.*

*If you don’t see me [when] you enter
the door,
Just keep right on searching over the
shore.
I’ll be there watching, waiting for you,
Some come right on in shouting,
praising God too.*

*Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me,
You’ll find me, yes, you’ll find me.
Somewhere in glory, you’ll find me
Singing and shouting in eternity.*



Special-hymn singing by John and Pauline Sherfey. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, July 1977.

Preaching by the Roadside

Melody John

Harmony Pauline

♩ = 60, with rubato

Preach-ing by the road- side un-der a tree... folks come a-long, and make a mock of... me

They say... we're cra- zy, soon we'll meet our fate... but now we've churches in... ev'- ry state.

Some-where in glo- ry you'll find me... you'll find me... yes, you'll find me.

Some-where in glo- ry you'll find me... sing-ing and shout-ing in ever-ni-ty.

Supplementary notation:

- ⌒ Pitch held slightly longer than notated.
- ⌒ Pitch held slightly shorter than notated.
- ↑ Pitch slightly higher than notated.

♭ Pitch slightly lower than notated.

- ~~~~~ Vocal glide from one pitch to next. Not a phrase marker.
- ~~~~~ Vocal glide from indefinite lower pitch to notated pitch.

Side 2, band 2.

"The Little Church Aisle." BELVIN HURT AND DELORES HURT FINCHAM (LATER JOINED BY JOHN SHERFEY AND DON SHERFEY) SING:

Some day they'll carry me down that
little church aisle
And place me before the pulpit stand
And my friends that I love and have
worked with
With tears in their eyes they'll march
behind.

Then life's work for me will all be over
And the roses that I planted will ever
shine.

So let us sow the righteous seed for the
reaping
When I take a ride up in the sky.

Some day, some happy day, some
beautiful morning
How lonely, how dreary, and yet so
still,

I'll cross the bridge of strife over Jordan
And walk the streets of gold of (up?)
Zion's hill.

The pearly gates for me be standing
open,
Saint Peter will be there I know.
But first of all I want to see my blessed
Saviour
For me he bore the cross so long ago.

Then life's work for me will all be over
And the roses that I planted will ever
shine.

So let us sow the righteous seed for the
reaping
When I take a ride up in the sky.

JOHN SHERFEY: Amen. BELVIN HURT:
Amen. JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.

Side 2, band 3.

"Precious Memories." JOHN SHERFEY:
No doubt you have loved ones that's done
gone on, and you're looking forward for
that reunion day. Here we have a
homecoming every year the first Sunday
in August. People come together of all
denominations. Families get together,
have a good time. But that's nothing to be
compared with that reunion in heaven.
You know how it is when one goes off
from home, when they stay a long time.
When they come back everybody greets
you so, they love you, they'll hug you.
With those that's been gone for years,
what a reunion that's going to be. We'll
meet in the air and thank God I believe
there'll be some rumbling. I believe
there'll be some shouting in the air when
all of God's people gather in the air to
meet the Lord. Praise the Lord. [Whis-
pers to Elsie] Which one? (ELSIE: "Pre-
cious Memories.") [To congregation]
Elsie wants to sing "Precious Memories."

Trust it will be a blessing to you. JOHN
SHERFEY, ELSIE SHERFEY MCNALLY
(John's sister), AND DON SHERFEY SING:

Precious memories, unseen angels,
sent from somewhere to my soul;
How they linger ever near me, and the
sacred past unfold.

Precious memories, how they linger,
how they ever flood my soul;
In the stillness of the midnight precious
sacred scenes unfold.

Precious father, loving mother, fly
across the lonely years;
And old home scenes of my childhood
in fond memory appear.

Precious memories, how they linger,
how they ever flood my soul;
In the stillness of the midnight precious
sacred scenes unfold.

As I travel on life's pathway, know not
what the years may hold;
As I ponder, hope grows fonder, precious
memories flood my soul.

Precious memories, how they linger,
how they ever flood my soul;
In the stillness of the midnight precious
sacred scenes unfold.

Side 2, band 4.

"I Saw the Face of Jesus." BETTY CAVE,
ARTHUR CAVE, WELFORD CAVE, ROSALEE
CAVE SING:

[Betty]
I know that man cannot imagine what
the Lord has prepared in glory land;
But I caught a glimpse in a vision of
that city God made with hands.

[All]
Oh I saw the face, the face of my Jesus;
So real was that smile that he wore;
I dreamed I had crossed chilly Jordan
And was standing on that heavenly
shore.

[Betty]
I looked beyond this vale of sorrow and
I saw my Jesus there in bright avail.
I saw that light shine all around him in
that city of an unending day.

[All]
Oh I saw the face, the face of my Jesus;
So real was that smile that he wore;
I dreamed I had crossed old chilly
Jordan
And I was standing on that heavenly
shore.
Yes I was standing on that heavenly
shore.



Special-hymn singing by Delores Hurt Fincham and Belvin Hurt. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, August 1977. This was a recording session for a WRAA radio broadcast, so they are more casually dressed than they would be in a worship service.



Special-hymn singing by (l. – r.) Donny Sherfey, Elsie Sherfey McNally, and John Sherfey. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, July 1977. The enrollment figure at right rear was optimistic at the time.

Healing Prayer

The healing prayer follows the specials. Those who feel ill step to the altar, where the deacons place olive oil on their foreheads, and Brother John asks his sons, Don and Charles, and their wives, Jeannie and Pammie, to sing a hymn from the pulpit, usually the first verse and the chorus of "The Healer":

*On the cross crucified, in great sorrow
he died;
the giver of life was he;
Yet my Lord was despised and rejected
of men,
this Jesus of Calvary.*

[Cho.]

*He was wounded for our transgressions;
he was bruised for our iniquities;
Surely he bore our sorrows, and by his stripes we are healed.*

When they stop, Brother John quotes the scriptural authority for the healing, James

5:14–15: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick."

Then he and the deacons begin to pray (side 2, band 5). All but the ones prayed over (who remain silent) pray spontaneously as the Spirit moves them, asking the Lord to heal. As they did in the altar prayer, the voices shift from speech to chant and back to speech at the close. Sometimes Brother John and the deacons lay their hands on a sick person's head or shoulders, sometimes not. The touching is restrained, but the praying is vehement.

A healing prayer is unusual in Baptist churches; it is more typically Pentecostal. On the other hand, no one in the church claims to have the special spiritual gift of healing, so the ceremony is unlike the spectacular mass faith healings, where cancer, heart disease, deafness, paralysis, and the like, are said to be cured. Here the diseases are more modestly named, if they

are named at all, as pains in the back or legs, for example, and the cures, if they occur, are not immediately and publicly demonstrated or testified to. Failure to heal is believed to be the result of insufficient faith or the mysteriousness of God's ways (see, for example, the prayer request on p. 7).

Occasionally, Brother John forgets to offer the healing prayer ceremony and moves directly into the sermon instead. In that case a member of the congregation sometimes reminds him before the testimony period that follows the invitation, and he will offer to hold it then. If he forgets and no one reminds him until after the morning service, he will offer it at the night service.

Side 2, band 5.

Healing Prayer. JOHN SHERFEY: Amen. We're going to pray at this time. [Holds up Bible.] How many believes this to be the Word of God that I hold in my hand? You believe that God'll do what he says

he'll do? I want you to pray that prayer with me right now, will you? Faith believing. [John Sherfey leads prayer.] O God our Heavenly Father Lord as we come before the throne of grace, Father we come Lord this morning as humble God as we know how. Father we know this morning Lord that in our hands we can bring nothing, but oh God, Jesus that through you, Lord you can do all things, you can do miracles. Lord we've seen the miracles performed our Father so many times, we've all needs this morning that's walked down this aisle, said "Brother John I want you to pray for me and they'll be healed." God we know this morning that your power is so real and God that you're able, our Father, to touch to the uttermost hah* our Father regardless of what the infirmity might be in their bodies this morning. God we pray hah Lord that right now thou would heal hah would heal and touch oh Jesus hah upon their bodies Lord right now hah in the name of Jesus Christ Father hah hah Lord touch 'em and make 'em whole hah our Father God that we hold on to hah obey the Holy Spirit hah and o God that they'll be able hah to lift up holy hands hah and shout the praises of God hah hah because their bodies hah have been made whole hah hah through the blood of the Holy Ghost hah of the Lord Jesus Christ hah Lord you touch and pray for 'em hah and to know that right now in the name of Jesus we make this prayer. Amen. Go in peace. ["The Healer" fades in background.]

Sermon, Invitation, and Prayer

After the healing prayer, Brother John steps behind the pulpit and makes a few remarks, welcoming visitors or relating a recent news item or personal experience from which he draws a lesson. The sermon proper (side 3) begins when he reads the scriptural passage that provides him with the basic outline of his discourse. During the next twenty-five to fifty minutes he "preaches out" or explains the meaning of each verse, and in doing so he follows a pattern of language and action. He begins in a normal public-speaking voice, but then, as the Spirit anoints him, he sways back and forth, swinging his arms and legs in a kind of dance that may take him down to the altar and into the congregation and back to the pulpit, all the while chanting louder and faster, punctuating each phrase

*Not laughter, but the sound of a forceful exhalation.



Healing prayer. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, August 1977.

with a loud *hah* as he sucks in air. The chant stops abruptly, and he goes on to the next verse or topic.

Brother John prepares for his sermons by praying, reading the Bible, and meditating, waiting until he feels that the Lord is impressing a certain scriptural passage on his mind to serve as his text; then he continues to pray and study. Usually the passages come to him a few days or the night before he preaches, but sometimes, he says, the Lord impresses a particular Scripture on his mind just before the sermon. This he attributes to the special need of someone sitting in the congregation at the time, although he does not know who the needful person is. "When I'm in the pulpit preaching," he said, "God just seemingly—now God don't talk to me like I've heard some people say he does. To me, when God is speaking to me, it's through the impression on my mind. In other words, it seems like it's said, but there's no voice. And when I'm preaching, it goes the same way. It just comes in my mind and it's said. I don't have to stand and wait, or meditate what I'm going to say, because I depend on God, and it just comes thataway. It always has."⁴³

Certain themes recur in Brother John's sermons: the battle between God and the devil for the individual soul; the wickedness of the world; the hypocrisy of certain

types of preachers; appropriate stories of Bible characters and incidents; stories of his personal experiences, particularly his conversion experience and his call from God to preach; pleas for the unsaved to convert and an explanation of how it must be done; and the joys of the Christian life in this world and the world to come. The sermon on this album is presented in its entirety; the occasion was the homecoming service, and so, appropriately, it foretells the joys of the heavenly homecoming, bonding the family of Christian believers in the congregation as it explains what they can look forward to.

"When a man's preaching in the Spirit," Brother Jesse Comer explained, "his Spirit and your Spirit will link together and will let you know that he's preaching the word of God, and he's preaching it in the Spirit."⁴⁴ The shift from speaking the sermon to chanting and singing it is, according to Sister Beatrice Hughes, a sign of a "superior blessing"⁴⁵ or, as Brother Belvin Hurt put it, a "special anointment" of the Holy Spirit. "I'm telling you," he went on, "when the Lord anoints him [Brother John] that way, it's something going on. Neighbor, souls a-coming, souls going to come to saving."⁴⁶ This is how the members of the church explain one of the more interesting phenomena of language in religious practice, a phenomenon which occurs in cul-

tures throughout the world when the deity is understood to speak in an extraordinary voice through a shaman, priest, or other human medium.

Brother John closes the sermon by asking everyone to bow his head while he offers the unconverted a chance to raise their hands for prayer. Then he prays aloud, thanking the Lord for the service that morning and for the blessings bestowed and asking for strength for the future.

The altar call (invitation) follows the prayer; Brother John asks anyone who wishes to come forward and be prayed over, either to be saved or to be returned to the Christian community after falling away. The congregation sings a hymn, chosen by Don Sherfey, while John Sherfey waits at the pulpit rostrum. The hymns chosen, such as "Pass Me Not," "Softly and Tenderly," "Almost Persuaded," and "Why Not Tonight," have lyrics that are meant to draw sinners forward. If someone steps out, Brother John meets the person at the altar, then asks whether he seeks salvation or restitution. He motions to his wife and daughter-in-law to come help him pray if it is a woman, to the deacons if it is a man. They pray aloud all at once until the person is satisfied.

After the prayer is over, Brother Don leads another hymn—one which the congregation knows from memory—while everyone walks to the altar for an "old-fashioned handshake," hugging the person prayed for and one another in a show of family joy, love, and unity. At this point, perhaps once a month, Brother John opens the church for membership. A prospective member may join by letter from another church or on the basis of oral testimony to the congregation then and there.

(For side 2, band 6, see pp. 17–18.)

Side 3.

Sermon, invitation, and prayer. JOHN SHERFEY: I'd like to read this morning by the help of God from the fourth chapter of First Thessalonians, reading a few verses there, about five verses, to be exact. Said, "But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep that you sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord: that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord

shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we—ones is a-living—which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." I don't know of anything beloved in my life that's any more comforting this morning than to know praise God that there is a homecoming day for God's people. Now beloved we call this a homecoming day; we have our homecoming here at this church on the first Sunday in August each year. And beloved this is a homecoming. But my brother and sister I'm looking forward on to the great final homecoming of God's people. Beloved, that's the one when we'll meet in the air with the Lord Jesus Christ my beloved friends. Now if you'll notice beloved in *hah* in the verse seventeen, he said, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up." Now beloved caught up means to be picked up and carried away. My friend now this morning it's going to do away with this old thing,⁴⁷ beloved, that a lot of people believe that when *hah* they get saved beloved then *hah* when people are lost they're all going together but the Bible don't teach that and I can't preach that. If I did I'd be preaching you a false doctrine this morning, and God forbid that I'd ever do something like that. My friend, the Bible said, "Then we which are alive and remain," talking of Christian people, *hah* the Apostle Paul was writing *hah* to the church of the Thessalony, and brother he was saying beloved that those that are dead and gone on to be with the Lord *hah* he said we will not prevent them which are asleep for the dead in Christ *hah* *hah* shall rise first *hah* then we which are alive and remain *hah* *hah* shall be changed in a moment *hah* my friends or be caught up together *hah* to meet them in the clouds *hah* *hah* with the Lord and so shall we *hah* ever be with the Lord *hah* wherefore comfort one another *hah* with these words neighbor *hah* if you've got a loved one *hah* that outstripped you in this walk of life *hah* and gone on to be with God *hah* don't weep for 'em here *hah* but look for the homecoming day *hah* that's on the other side.

That's what I'm looking for this morning. Oh it's a homecoming here, yes. And I'm proud of it this morning. But I'm



John Sherfey preaching. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, August 1977.

looking forward to that day when every child of God can meet Jesus in the cloud. Oh you say, "Preacher, what about those that died a long time ago?" Thank God brother the old, this old tabernacle brother the Bible said will dissolve and go back hah to the dust of the earth hah my friends but hallelujah we've got a building eternal in the heavens hah my friend not made with hands hah that we're looking for after awhile hah and brother praise God hah old John's gonna move hah after awhile hah I'm gonna leave this old robe of flesh hah I'll drop this robe of flesh hah and seize the everlasting prize hah life eternal hah in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can't help but think as I asked you to come forward hah this morning to pray, you that are sick, brother let me tell you something. One day after awhile sisters you're going to drop off that old robe.

That old flesh is going back to the dust from which it came. Praise God this mortal put on immortality. This corruptible put on the incorruption. My friend then shall be brought to pass. O death where is your sting? O grave where's your victory. Thanks be to God who giveth us hah the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord hah. Brother I'm saying to you today hah the victory's in Jesus this morning hah. It's not because you're Baptist hah. It's not because you're Pentecostal. It's not because you're Methodist. But it's [claps hands] because you're saved hah by the power of God hah and filled with the Holy Ghost hah brother that you're in his care today.⁴⁸

Oh caught up. [Light laugh.] That's one of the greatest words I ever —. That hit me like a wedge. Caught up. Brother, caught up, thank God. Brother I'll tell you

every time I think of that I remember a sermon I preached a long time ago. A man that God caught up by the locks of his hair and took on a sightseeing tour. Amen, it's in the Bible, praise God. Brother, God's gonna catch every one of us up. Saved people that are here this morning, God's gonna catch you up, neighbor. He'll take you right through the clouds. You say, "Preacher, how am I going? I don't have any force." If you've got the Spirit of God in you, you're going. Amen, brother praise God you won't have to have a sputnik hah hah put to your feet and hah hah go down to Cape Canaveral and be set off to go up hah but thanks be to God you can go from the [claps hands] church house huh you can go from the kitchen hah you can go from the living room hah if your heart's right with God.

But if it's not right with God, you're not

going nohow. Amen. So brother this morning we'll be caught up. Caught up. That's what he said here. Together. Caught up together. Now it's not my friend some are going ahead of the others. You say, "Well, preacher, I thought the dead already been there." Yes, they have, they're basking in the sunlight of God right now. Amen I know this morning, my daddy and my son, Pauline's people and my brother, and others that's outstripped me and your loved ones that were saved, they're basking in the sunlight of God. Amen. My friend but I'm going to tell you something according to this blessed holy Bible. And I believe this to be the infallible word of God. I believe it'll stand when this world's on fire. Praise God this morning the Bible says that the Lord himself shall come. At the trump, brother, he'll come with a shout. Brother and listen the spirit of



Prayer for a person who has fallen away from the faith. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, April 1978.

those, or the soul of those men, women, boys, and girls hah that's done gone on to be with God, he'll bring 'em back with him, they'll go to the dust of the earth, brother, where they were put down, and praise God they'll come forth with a glorified body huh fashioned like the Lord's.

"All right, preacher, then after they do that what else is going to happen?" When they get up even with us—brother you're talking about a quick change. Amen? Sometimes it takes me a long time to get dressed. Sometimes I just can't hardly get one foot in the leg, pants leg. Amen, it takes me awhile to get dressed. But brother that day I'm gonna change so quick nobody'll see me. Amen. Hallelujah thank God this morning. You say, "Preacher, you sure have some wild ideas." Brother I'm just telling you the Bible says hah we'll be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye huh. Brother as fast as you can twinkle your eye hah you'll get out of this old house and get in the new one hah. Glory to God you won't have to pack hah. Some say I'm gon' pack and get me ready; honey I've done packed. Amen, I'm not packing praise God. I'm packed and ready right now hah. If God wants me, here I am.

You say, "Preacher I'd be afraid to do that." You better get on this altar then. If there's something in your life that's a-bothering you, there's something that's

hindering you, you better get on this altar and repent of your sins [claps hands] hah, get your name in the Lamb's book of life hah because, praise God this morning, if God wants me, I'm not afraid to die.

Hallelujah hallelujah. Told a boy the other day. We was talking about driving a gasoline truck. I know this don't have nothing to do with the message. But I've drove 'em and I think nothing about it. "I'd be going down the road," he said, "well Lord, I'd be scared to death." He said, "I'm afraid that thing'll blow up and kill me." I said, "You're forgetting while you're driving that dump truck. You've got a hundred gallons of gas a-swinging on each side of you." I said, "That's enough right there to blow you to kingdom come." And I said, "If your heart was right with God you wouldn't worry whether it blowed up or whether it didn't." Amen? If you're ready to go, you're not worried. Praise God this morning. You say, "Well, I don't believe in rushing it." You ain't rushing it. You ain't rushing it a bit. That's not rushing it. We've got to work to make a living, praise God. Amen, you're not rushing it. If you watch what you're doing, there's no danger. But they're just scared to death. Amen, you know why he was? I'll tell you why. He likes to grab the old bottle and nip it a little bit. Amen? Every time he comes around, I run him out of my shop one day because he had a can of beer in

his hand. I said, "Get out of here and don't bring it back. I don't want to see it." Amen? Praise God this morning, I believe children of God ought to stand up like a lion. Amen, brother. Praise God, he don't like me now because I told him that. Praise God, but that's all right, I still stand the same way. Amen brother praise God this morning, because when Jesus comes I'm a-going with him. I mean that this morning. I'm a-going with him. Praise God. All right. Brother let me tell you, the church, I said the church, is going up, and the gates of hell can't stop it. Amen. The church is going up and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Jesus told 'em in Matthew, he said, "Peter, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I'll build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." You say, "Well, preacher, what in the world has happened? What's wrong with the churches today?" Brother let me tell you it ain't the church of Jesus Christ; it's the devil's crowd. Amen. Praise God, that's exactly what's wrong. People yield to the lust of the flesh more than they yield to God Almighty. My Bible said to be ye leaders of the Spirit. Let the Spirit of God lead you where God wants you to, and brother then it'll be all right. My friend I want you to notice.

Brother there's a lot to do in the church. Brother there's a lot to do in this church. Nowhere did God ever tell you: saved, set down, do nothing. Brother the first of all, there's a war to be fought. Amen. There's a war to be fought in the church. I'm talking about believers now, not unsaved. I'm talking about saved people. Look in Ephesians, chapter six, verse ten and through eighteen. Brother there's a war to fight. Jesus told 'em, he said, "Put on the warfare. Put on the whole armor of God hah. That you be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Church if you don't put 'em on this morning hah the devil's gonna tear you down. You've got to put 'em on. The whole armor of God.

Brother then there's a race to run. Some say, "Well, preacher, all I've got to do is just get saved. I'm all right." Honey I disagree with that. Amen, I disagree with that. Bless God there's a race to run. My brother you don't run a race a-setting down, do you? Amen. I've never seen nobody win a race a-setting down. Brother to win the race they've got to run. If it's in an automobile they've got to set there and steer the thing hah and keep it a-going to

stay ahead. Same way in the Christian life, brother. You've got to stay on the mark, toe it, and God'll bless your soul.

That's what's the matter with the world today, brother. They got saved and somebody sugar-coated 'em a sermon and they went to sleep. Amen, let somebody come along and wake 'em up and they get so mad at him they could kill him. Amen. Praise God this morning I'm saying to you there's a race to run. If you want to win the race, brother, you're going to have to stay in there and fight it, brother. Praise God this morning I used to run in the sack race. You ever run in the sack race? That's pretty hard to do, get your feet down in a sack and run. Amen, but I've done it and I've won the race. Amen, I'm in a race this morning, and if you're going to run with me, let's go, bless the Lord hah. Let's win it for Jesus. He'll bless our souls.

Amen. Brother there's a race to be run. Brother, Paul said, "I run the race with patience." Amen, brother I'm saying look in Hebrews chapter twelve verse one and two. My brother, the Bible says brother, "These have run the race before us." He said, "We're laid under such a great cloud of witnesses, let us," he said, "run the race with patience. Looking on the author and the finisher of our faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Brother you run the race and the finishing line's on out yonder somewhere, you'll cross it after awhile. Amen, all right. Then there's something else. Look in First Corinthians chapter three, verse nine: the labor of love. Brother let me tell you there's love in God's people. Brother Belvin mentioned it this morning. If we're saved by God's grace, there's love in our hearts. Amen, if you've got hate in your heart this morning you ain't right with God. I don't care who you are or what you say you are, where you stand or how high you are, whether you're president of the United States hah or of Congress or of whatever it is hah if the heart ain't right with God hah there's no love there and you're on your road to hell.

Brother let me tell you. First Corinthians chapter three, verse nine, will tell you.⁴⁹ Paul said, "If I give my body to be burned and have not love, charity, it profit me nothing." Brother you could give a man everything in the world, but if you don't have love, church, you ain't got nothing. Amen, and I'm proud to tell you this statement this morning. I'm not bragging, but I feel like I should brag. I've had people to come here to this church



Old-fashioned handshake. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, August 1977.

praise God and say they felt the freedom and the liberty of God right here. Honey I'd hate for these singers or these people to come here, these preachers and these people to come, walk into this church, and say, "Lord, I never felt so out of place in all of my life." Honey if you'd go ahead and tell that on me, I'd have to sit down and cry. I would. I want you to feel at home when you come here. Why if you don't feel at home this morning there's something wrong with you. It ain't me; I've tried. I've done my best. I want everybody huh to feel like they're God's children this morning. The house was built for God's people. The house was built for the unsaved hah to come in and get right with God. Brother that's the love of God this morning. We've got to have that love, before we'll ever get anywhere with God.

Brother we've got to have that love. Praise God this morning. Brother I want you to know the church of Christ will triumph after awhile. Amen, did you know this morning the church has been kicked from pillar to post. Brother they've suffered the persecution. They've had lies told on 'em and everything else. Amen, I'm talking about the church. Of the living God. Brother every time you do something good the old devil'll run down the road and make a lie on you. Amen. But I'll

tell you bless God we're going to triumph over it, all of it. Amen, brother, Jesus went down in Jerusalem one time. If you remember he set down right on the hill and looked over in Jerusalem. And he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft have I prayed for you and prayed that you would do what you're supposed to do but you didn't do it. You've killed my prophets; you've stoned 'em to death." And he said, "Now," he said, "I weep for you." He set there and wept as he looked over it. My friend but I want you to know one thing. Brother when he told 'em to go down there and get the foal of an ass and bring it up to him, he said, "If they ask you any questions just say, 'My Saviour has need of it.'" Amen, thank God, went down and got this little donkey and brought it up to Jesus, and he got on that little old donkey. I can just see him this morning, my Saviour, as he got up on that little old donkey, and brother they even put their coats on him, hah they spread their coats down for the donkey to step on. Brother he triumphed over Jerusalem. I want you to know this morning the church is gonna triumph hah over this world, praise God, and it's soon coming hah whether you believe it or not hah, the church is [claps hands] gonna triumph hah over this world thank God hah. I'm

glad to tell you hah that Jesus is the head of it.

So many people say, "Well, he's the head of our church." Honey, Jesus is the head of this church. Amen, I try to pastor here by the help of God. And I'm not very well thought of, I know that, by a lot of people, but I try to do my best. Amen. But praise God this morning we're going to triumph after awhile. Amen, we're going to come forth with the victory. Amen, listen honey. The future of the church is in the air. Amen, brother. Praise God we'll be caught up with him in the air. That's the most blessed thought this morning, of being caught up. Just think. That daddy or that mother of yours, that brother or that sister of yours or that baby that you once so loved so dearly, loving him or her so much, that you wept and you cried, you've cried. One day after awhile when Jesus steps off of the throne of [unintelligible] God's gonna look over at the Son, and say, "Son, it's time to go get 'em. It's time to go get 'em." I believe it's close. I believe it's close. "It's time, Son, to go down and bring 'em home." Thank God he'll come through the clouds, Brother Jesse, with a shout when he comes. That soul a-going back wherever that loved one of yours was praying, that soul's going right down to it. Thank God it'll get up.

You talking about a reunion, this is a reunion here. I have a lot of, some of my folks here this morning. Praise God and this is a reunion. Not only a reunion is it just because they're here, but because all of you are here. It's a reunion. But I'm looking forward to that reunion in heaven. Some'll say, "Preacher, preacher, it's gonna be awful quiet." No it won't. I believe it'll be noisy. I sure do. I believe this is the quietest world you'll ever live in. I sure do. I believe when God's people, when those that have been gone so long, as I've told you before, I'm a pretty big man, I thought I was bigger than what I really was the day they closed the casket in my daddy's face, [weeping] put the lid down, I couldn't stand it no longer. But I'm telling you this morning praise God the next time I see daddy he'll have a new body. Next time I see Buddy ⁵⁰ he'll have a new body. Praise God walking with Jesus, hallelujah. I'm looking forward to that day. I've told you before about my little, my brother ⁵¹ that died. Died with TB. He called us brothers round his bed, said, "Boys, I want you to meet me in heaven." I said, "Ester, I'll meet you." I wasn't a Christian at that time. I wasn't saved, but praise God this morning, I can look into the portal of glory and say, "Ester, I'm on my way." I'm not there yet, but I'm coming praise God hah. Some say, "Preacher, I wouldn't make a statement like that." Why not, hah. If you've got God on your side you can make it, neighbor. 'Cause God'll help us.

I want to tell you something. When that day comes, brother there'll be some shouting in the air. Amen. These Baptists so dead they can't shout will shout then, praise God. Amen, some say, "Preacher, I don't believe in shouting [unintelligible] don't want to [unintelligible] in heaven, then. I believe in it here and I'll believe in it when I meet Jesus. I'll believe in it when I meet all of God's people on the other side. And when I start marching down through heaven singing that song "Raise the bloodstained banner," I'll march through, have on the most beautiful robe. [Weeping] Elsie, I love the suit—her and James ⁵² give me this suit—but praise God, I'll get my robe on without a spot, without a wrinkle. You talking about an old boy a-marching, honey, *Whoop!* Glory to God. I'll march brother right down through the portal of glory. I don't worry about being saved in it hah. I can't say much here hah. Have a throat saved over there thank God hah I'll

have a new throat then, one that'll never tear up, sister. Praise God this morning. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Hallelujah praise God this morning. If you're not saved get right with God. You need to be a child of the King this morning. There's coming a reunion day brother when all of God's people will get together, brother praise God, 'round the throne eternal.

I'll tell you when I get there I'll be one of the happiest men in the world. Brother I'm happy now, I'm happy in my soul. I don't know whether you are or not. I don't know whether you're happy this morning or not, but I'm happy in my soul. Brother I feel a wheel in a wheel, as Ezekiel said. Ezekiel said there was a wheel in a wheel. Brother I used to run the old mowing machine. I don't know whether you ever drove one or not, the old horse-powered mowing machine. It run by a lot of cogs. Brother there's a great old big cog on that thing about this big around that does the work, and then they have a little bitty one there. Brother I want you to know when that old big one starts to begin to rolling brother, that little one really gets up and going. That's the way it is. Jesus is the big one; I'm the little one. Brother when he gets started in me, sometimes he keeps me moving. Amen, thank God, thank God. Brother it's so real this morning. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Amen, so beloved I'm looking forward to that great reunion day. And then we, you right here, sitting right here this morning, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them who, those that've outstripped us in this walk of life, gone on to be with the Lord, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. We'll meet the Lord in the air. It don't say a word about him setting his feet on the Mount of Olives. But brother I'll tell you, you will find it in there where he will set his feet on the Mount of Olives, but when he does, you'll find the armies in heaven'll be following him upon white horses clothed in linen white and clean. He'll set his feet right on the Mount of Olives. I stood on the Mount of Olives one day, and looked over into Jerusalem. Standing on the Mount of Olives, you look in this direction and the eastern gate is there. They have double gates and the Bi— our God told us when Jesus, when Jesus comes back and sets his feet on the Mount of Olives, he'll march right straight across through the eastern gate, into the city of Jerusalem. That's when he'll set up with his father David's throne and rear it again. The Bible says it and I believe it.

Thank God this morning. I believe it. I believe the word of God. I believe it'll stand when the world's on fire. Oh hallelujah. The Mount of Olives is a beautiful place. It's a beautiful place. But neighbor I'm saying to you this morning the new Jerusalem is gonna be more beautiful than that. Amen, thank God for that homecoming day in the city of God.

I think I told you this before a long time ago. Pauline⁵³ remembers very well. I, some of you's maybe never heard me tell this. I just feel like telling you this morning. I was laying flat on my back in the bed. I don't know what happened. I can't tell you. I'm like Paul; I was caught up into the third heaven. But I seen something I can tell you about. I can see something I can tell you about. Whether in the flesh or out of the flesh I don't know, in the Spirit or out of the Spirit I don't know. I can't tell you. But I was laying flat on my back. Brother and I thought I was dead. I thought I was gonna die that time. And I was laying there that day and something happened to me. I don't know what happened. But I do know one thing. I got up in about twenty feet. I was climbing this narrow path. Somebody said it was a vision. I don't know whether it was or not, but I was going this narrow path and just room for me to walk on it. And somebody caught me around the shoulders and tried to throw me off, and I remember very well I did thisaway [rolls shoulders to left] and they went down into the pit a-hollering, they went out of sound, out of— they just kept on going. And I kept on walking. And when I got in twenty feet of that door, the beautiful gate, and I got in twenty feet of it, Jesus and Buddy Wayne⁵⁴ walked by. Buddy Wayne was on, and he walked this way. The most beautiful hill I ever seen in my life. I haven't got there yet—I'm still trying to make that twenty feet—but bless God I'll soon make that twenty feet, amen? Praise God this morning. And when Buddy Wayne spoke to me, that's when I came out of whatever I was in. I come out of it, and thanks be to God this morning I'm still traveling that narrow path. And I'm gonna keep on traveling it. Praise God this morning. God is so real. I feel him in my soul.

Elsie just look up to the Lord; he's able to heal your body. Praise God you won't have to stay over there in the hospital.⁵⁵ You can be back home with James. I know what God can do this morning. Hallelujah, sister Bea,⁵⁶ would you come to the piano

for us please. Glad to have her to come in at this time. Ask her to kindly play "Just As I Am." Donny,⁵⁷ get you a song ready. That's my message to you this morning, I hope you've enjoyed it by the help of God.

[Invitation.] I'd like for every head to be bowed, eyes closed, Christians praying this morning, praise God. I wonder this morning how many, how many are here this morning, you know beyond a shadow of a doubt right now in your heart, there's no doubt, there's no waver in your heart right now if the Lord would come, you'd go be with him? I'd like to see your hand raised with mine. How many can do that this morning? Raise your hand with mine, you're ready to meet Jesus if he comes? You're ready. Some that couldn't raise your hand. You may take 'em down. I wonder right now, while heads are bowed, Christians are praying, no one's looking around, I wonder how many'll raise your hand and say, "Preacher, honestly before God I'm not ready to meet him if he'd come. I'd like for you to pray for me right now." Would you raise your hand and say, "Pray for me." Is there a one anywhere while we wait just a minute. Raise your hand and say, "Pray for me, preacher, I'm not ready. I'm not ready." Maybe you've once known the Lord and you've strayed away and you'd like to be remembered in prayer this morning. Would you raise your hand and say, "Pray for me. Pray for me." How about it, is there a one? Is there one? God's dealing with your hearts this morning. I'd heed to that spirit if I were you. I'd listen to it this morning. Is there one, raise your hand and say, "Pray for me. Pray for me right now, preacher, pray for me. I'm not ready to meet Jesus." How many'll do that right now?

[Prayer.] Our Father, we thank you Lord for this hour. We thank you Lord for the word of God. Thank you Lord for your Spirit that we felt here this morning. Father, we thank you for every song that's been sung. Thank you Lord for every prayer that's been prayed. Father, we thank you for those that prayed while we brought the message. 'Cause Lord we're too little and we're too weak to do anything without you. But Lord we know that when they start calling upon your high and holy name, that you can use this weak body. We thank you Lord for your goodness, your mercy, and your love. Thank you Lord for each and every one that's come this way. Father we thank you for these our brothers and sisters that's come, the ones from down a long ways, Sister

Elsie, Lord, that's got out of the hospital and come. Thank you Lord, we pray you'd bless her, heal the body, God we know you're able, strengthen mother, Lord, we're proud to have her with us today, we thank you God for it. Strengthen the others, Lord, we pray this morning, have your way, save some precious soul, and Father we praise you for it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Testimony

After the invitation, Brother John steps up to the rostrum and asks if "anybody has a word on your heart." A period of testimony follows, during which individuals stand and tell what God has done in their lives or speak as they are moved. "A lot of people have a testimony on their heart that they want to share with somebody else," Brother John explained. "And what I mean by testimony is something that's happened to them that they feel like God's blessed them in a certain special way and they want to share it with somebody else."⁵⁸

A testimony need not be a narrative; it may simply be a short expression of general gratitude. It may be a relatively mundane narrative—for example, a story of how a prayer to find a lost pair of gloves was answered. A story like this will be told a few times at most. But other narratives are more important, they are retold often, and although the form changes according to the context of their telling, the sequence of their events is stable. These recurring testimonies fall into a relatively small number of subject categories, such as conversion narratives, visions, and miracles, all of which the individual testifier must have experienced personally. Sister Edith Cabbage's testimony (side 2, band 6) is typical in this regard; it is a story of miraculous healing and the lesson that she draws from it, combined with expressions of joy and requests for prayer. The women in the church have the best opportunity to make their voices heard in Sunday school and testimony. "When I testify, I give just exactly what the Lord gives me to say," Sister Edith explained. "He tells me to get up and tell it, . . . and after that maybe I couldn't repeat it over again. . . . I don't make up that testimony and get up there. Just whatever God gives me to say when I get up there, that's what I get up and say."⁵⁹ Thus testimony is led by the Spirit. During her testimony, Sister Edith is self-aware ("You might think I'm



John Sherfey listens to playback of church service. Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, July 1977.

crazy") and scrupulous ("My legs has not bothered me *too* much since"—recognizing that the cure is not complete). Brother John responds encouragingly from the pulpit throughout.

Side 2, band 6.

Testimony. EDITH CUBBAGE: You know, Brother John, I just thank the Lord for giving me another week to be back again in the house of the Lord. (JOHN SHERFEY: Yes.) You know I enjoy coming to the house of the Lord, and I love to see people get saved. You know nothing fills my heart no better than to see people confess and come up and get saved. 'Cause you know if they could just see what was going on in this old world and see these worldly things. It's just like the one said, "Give up to God." You know we got to give up these things, too. (JOHN SHERFEY: That's right.) And if we don't give up 'em and if we hold on to 'em, we're not pleasing God. You know that I'm glad that I'm saved, and I know that God thought enough of me that he saved me. And I know just like in Esther it says here awhile ago: the Lord answers prayers

every day and night. (JOHN SHERFEY: Yes, he does.) Anytime that you call on him in need, you know that he's right there. And more people's out and gone and they never know how to get in touch with him. But all you got to do is call up to the telephone to the Lord (JOHN SHERFEY: [laughter.]) and he's right there for you to hear. 'Cause you know (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) I've spent many a night that I thought I was going to be by myself. But you know I wasn't. The Lord was with me, and he kept me just like I was meant to be. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) And I'm so proud of that. It's awful plain that we got a God today big enough to take care of just as little a thing as we are. (JOHN SHERFEY: That's right.)

You know I studied that the other night and got to praying about it, this, and I'm got to tell this for the glory of the Lord. You know I was a-praying about this t'other night. I've had such a misery in my legs that I just couldn't stand on my feet to walk around the bed. I still thanked the Lord for it; I didn't get worried nor get upset about it. I just thanked the Lord. And I said, "If it's my time to go, I'm

ready to go, Lord. You know what's the best. But if it ain't, to give me some ease." You know it eased off. And you know I said, "Lord, you're a bigger thing than what these medicines that I've been taking, and God and [if I] trust that and can't trust you?" These pills I take and the doctor give me—I have to tell this because it's for the glory of the God. (JOHN SHERFEY: Might be somebody else.) It's not for me. He give me some pills, and I'm going to tell you that night I went to bed if I would have died I wouldn't have knowed where I was at 'cause I just felt like that I was numb all over. The next morning, I didn't have no feelings until the next morning in my legs and arms. Now this is the truth, and God knows it is (JOHN SHERFEY: Bless your heart.) and I said, "Lord I don't have to take things like this. Trust things and such a little old thing as that little old pill (JOHN SHERFEY: Bless your heart.) to make me feel like that. And as great a God as you are and as big as your heart you can't take care of a little old thing like this?" You know I just got a real good blessing out of that. And you know my legs has not bothered (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen, amen.) me too much since. And them pills is a-setting there in that drawer in that cabinet this morning, and I've not touched a one but God's healed that leg that it don't hurt like it did. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) And I don't say it's going to be well, 'cause it might not be. But what stripes and what pains we carry is nothing to what he's carried for us. (JOHN SHERFEY: That's right.) If we just would think one time, our little suffering here is nothing to what he has done for us. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen, amen.) And you know I think that sometime, and when I feel bad I just still thank the Lord, and you know when I do that, I feel better than I do if I was to get this stuff, Lord have mercy.

You know (JOHN SHERFEY: Praise the Lord.) I'm so proud of that and I know that I've got a God that saved me and I know he's big enough to keep me. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) And you know I'm so proud of that. People might think I'm crazy but if I could stand up here and tell you that everything that I have prayed and asked to the Lord myself that he's answered. You know I—it would take me till next week this time for you all to get home. 'Cause I couldn't tell you all of it. But I do know God has saved me, and I know God's big enough to keep me. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) And I know he's heaped

promises upon his promises he can do and I know you all know that. And I want you all to pray for me 'cause I got children that's lost. But I'm a-praying for 'em that they'll come in before it's too late. (JOHN SHERFEY: Keep praying.) And bless the Lord, I know that the Lord's bigger than the people on earth. And oh I'm so proud that I've got somebody that's so much greater than the devil. Oh I'm so proud of that this morning. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) I'm so thankful that I've got a Lord that keeps me day and night. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen, bless the Lord.) Ohh, there ain't nobody knows that until he comes down with some—. When we come down let's don't wait till we come down to die before we ask God to save us. You know we don't know what we might have to go through with for God to save us. But you know when he says he'll save us we're going to bear it, and he don't put no more on us than we can bear. You know I'm so proud of that. And I'm so proud that we've got a Lord that will tell us the truth. (JOHN SHERFEY: Amen.) And you all pray for me 'cause I want to be just what the Lord wants me to be. And there ain't nobody knows how I'm filled with the Lord this morning but myself. I couldn't tell you all. (JOHN SHERFEY: But I imagine how you feel.) You might think I'm crazy. But the Lord has really blessed me I mean through all this time that I've been through here God has really blessed me. I'm still thanking him, and he's going to bless me more. And if he don't, I'll soon go on home to see the Lord. [Weeping] Ohh I'm so proud that the time has come for me to go home. Ohhh hallelujah Jesus, thank you Lord, he's answered prayers so many times. Oh hallelujah thank you Jesus. Thank you Lord. Thank you Jesus. (JOHN SHERFEY: Praise the Lord [laughs]. Amen. Bless you Sister Cubbage.)

The service closes after everyone has had the chance to testify, and Brother John makes certain that "all hearts and minds are clear." He makes a few announcements and closing remarks, then walks to the rear of the sanctuary and asks a member of the church to speak an extemporaneous benediction. As the people file out of the church, they shake hands with Brother John and visit with one another on the way out and in the parking lot outside. The morning service has lasted from three to four hours.



*Edith Cabbage testifying.
Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, July 1977.*

The Life Story of Brother John Sherfey

Brother John's life story (side 4) closes out the album. It falls, broadly speaking, into the language category of testimony, since he views his life as an illustration of God's providence, and since the central events he chooses for narration are the same events he chooses to tell when he testifies in church or witnesses outside of church. Telling the story of one's entire life is not typical among grass-roots Baptists and Pentecostals, simply because there is no natural context for it. Yet it has a written counterpart in the spiritual autobiographies of St. Augustine, John Bunyan, Peter Cartwright, Jonathan Edwards, John Woolman, and others. Brother Sherfey told his life story in response to my request. Ken George and I had spoken with him informally about his life, and we had interviewed him formally in 1975 and 1976. But in 1977 I wanted to hear him tell his life story without interruption, to shape it in whatever sequence he wished and not in response to an interviewer's questions. The narrative that resulted would therefore emphasize what *he* thought was most significant to declare in the context of the public testimony, for he knew that it would be accessible in the archives of the Library of Congress, and he was happy to have it be there. I recorded his life story on videotape in the summer of 1977. Ken George and Brother

John's wife, sister Pauline, also were present. He told his life story without interruption, and could have continued longer had the tape not run out.

In his life story, he emphasizes two themes: family life and God's dealings with his soul. The two themes come together dramatically in the narration of his conversion experience, which occurred after the death of his five-year-old son, Buddy Wayne—a death which he interprets as a sign that he had not been living for the Lord, even though he had made a profession of faith as a younger man. The key event in the story prior to the conversion—and I have heard him tell it many times—is his inability to pray while holding his dying son in his arms. "So that would haunt me," he said. "By the night times it would haunt me." (Further evidence of the importance of the circumstances of his son's death is provided by his narration, at the close of the sermon on this album, of his vision of Jesus and Buddy Wayne walking together outside the "beautiful gate" of heaven.) Throughout his life story he contrasts his economic circumstances with his spiritual condition. Thinking of himself as someone who has been poor all of his life, he nevertheless emphasizes how happy he is with his family and his God. The loving relationships which bring him happiness are the most important source of his identity and the means by which he gains

dignity even in the face of economic deprivation. The life story also contains the narrative of his courtship, his calling from God to preach the gospel, the failure of his first attempt at a sermon, and one of several miracle stories that I have heard him tell. At almost every point he takes pains not only to narrate the events but to interpret them.

Brother John's ability to tell a lengthy, continuous life story is unusual in today's world. It is attributable partly to the practice he has had narrating portions of his life in testimony, and also to his skill in delivering long sermons. But probably more important to the telling is that, because of his religious world view, he can see his life forming a coherent pattern. He believes in the meaning and purpose of his life. His life story is typical, in the sense that the events conform to the conventions of Christian spiritual autobiography; yet it is also deeply personal, in that the events confirm his vision of the world and his place in it.

John Sherfey's life story is a spiritual autobiography in the form of a public, oral testimony. In it the twin themes of this album, language and family, combine. Outside the family of God, he felt estranged from his wife and children, unable to utter a prayer while his son was dying in his arms. He drifted, haunted by dreams, by the memory of his failure to live up to his earlier profession of faith, and by the feeling that God was punishing him by taking away his best-loved son. Months later he heard the gospel from a revival preacher and fell under conviction; the next night he opened his heart at the altar and prayed for forgiveness. He is certain that at that moment the Lord saved him.

Brother John's conversion (echoed by his call to preach) stands at the center of his life story and shapes it into the conventional pattern of spiritual autobiography: wickedness, followed by remorse, confession, repentance, salvation, assurance, and happiness. (Tellingly, his last sentence is, "But I'm happy in the Lord.") Despite its conventional pattern, the narrative is rich in concrete, individual detail. In the making of his life story Brother John's personality emerges, for who he thinks he is bears an obvious and direct relation to what he does, and it tells us why he persists in the old-fashioned religion, singing, praying, preaching, and testifying with uncommon energy and commitment.

Side 4.

John Sherfey's life story.

TITON: When and where were you born?²⁶⁰
SHERFEY: I was borned in Boone, North Carolina, Watauga County, in a little place called Howard's Creek. At that time daddy was hard up and I had a granny woman, if you know what that is: no doctor, just an old woman. In that community a lot of women used her, and so she's the one that delivered me. So my mother told me [laughs]; I don't remember all about that. My mother told me that this lady, I forgot what her name was, was what they call a granny woman; so she delivered me and she's the one that named me. And she's gave me the name I've always went by: John Claymon Sherfey. We stayed in North Carolina while I can recall I started at school. Howard's Creek School. I was six years old. And going to church in the Howard's Creek Baptist Church. And I can remember very well seeing my daddy lead singing in that old Baptist church.

When I was about six and a half years old, we moved from there, and he moved to Virginia, and stayed in Virginia one year. Course I didn't learn too much during that length of time; I went to school at the Three Springs School, but I wasn't satisfied. And moving into the community new and all, it took awhile to get used to the people in that area. So in about another year's time we moved to Tennessee, down around Blountville. And the most of my life was reared up in Tennessee, from around Johnson City, Kingsport, and Blountville, Bristol.

And so then as time grew on, why, naturally I grew to be a young man. And all young men I guess are probably so much alike. And I got to courting. I thought I was a bigger man than I really was. I fell in love with a little girl, Pauline Doran. I met her at church. I never have been against going to church. I was raised that way, to go to church, and my father would take us to church when I was young, and when I was older I still wanted to go. Anyway, when I got there and I saw this black-headed, beautiful girl, why naturally I fell for her. And you've heard the old saying "love at first sight." Well, she lived about two or three miles from this church. So I made eyes at her, of course, and, well, the way she looked at me I felt she fell for me, too. So I asked for a date when she come out the church that night. She didn't give me a date the first night, but later on, why, I got to taking her home, and dating her. And at that time I

couldn't afford an automobile. My daddy had an old '28 Chevrolet, and times was hard. People didn't have the money back then that we have today. So I had to walk to do my courting, which was about three miles. But I enjoyed it. I enjoyed going to see her. So I guess really and truly she was the only girl that I ever dated.

And then we went together for about eight months. And I got tired of walking, so I proposed to her to marry. And we first set the date for a later date, to get married at Christmas in 1940. So then I grew a little tired of walking, you might say, and I moved that date up. I asked her if it'd be all right if we got married on the twenty-third of November. So she agreed, and we got married on the twenty-third day of November 1940. Times was hard. I guess you people're going to laugh when I tell you this, but after I paid for the license, paid the preacher (and I only give him a dollar at that time), and paid a boy a dollar to take me to get married (in his car), and after I got through I didn't have one penny left in my pocket. Not one penny did I have left. And I sold a wheat crop that I had sowed, and had growing. I sold that to my brother-in-law to get the money to marry my wife with. Now that's how poor I started out.

But God has blessed us through these years. I'm not rich. I mean naturally speaking, as far as wealth of this world's concerned, I'm not rich. But I do have a wonderful family, and God's blessed us. We have a place to stay. But we started out poor. We stayed in the house with her parents until six months or longer. And then we got a little stuff together by her father and mother helping us. And of course my parents helped, too. And we moved up on the hill above her parents, in a little house that belonged to her brother. And he didn't charge me any rent or anything, just let me live in there. So we got started, and by working in 1941 I got me a job in Kingsport, Tennessee, at the Mead Corporation. And from then on, of course, well, I worked there for a long time and then changed jobs around.

But going back a little here before I get into all that, I come from rather a large family. My daddy was the daddy of eighteen children. He was married twice; his first wife died when she had two children, and then sixteen by my mother. Not all of them lived, but they had twelve that lived up till a few years ago; then one of my brothers died with TB. Course the rest of us are still living, and sort of scattered

all over the country. We've been poor all of our life. I don't have a rich brother, nor a rich sister, but I have some that's got nice homes, living well, doing well. Thank God for that. But that led us into this poor race, I guess you would call it, but we were a happy family. We used to have the best times together when we were all home. All of us children would get out to playing. In the wintertime, even. And of course we didn't have no bicycles to ride, we didn't have no cars to drive; all we had was a sled, or a little wagon, but we had fun. And usually on Sundays, why, we'd all get together and we'd go ginseng hunting if we weren't in church, or if we were in church, when we come back home that evening, we'd get out and go ginseng hunting, and just have a good time. And play ball and all that. We just had a wonderful time. But anymore it's got so that if they don't have an automobile, they can't go nowhere. Or a motorcycle [laughs].

But we had a good time then, and this went on through our life. Of course we was poor; daddy never did have—as the far as the world's goods is concerned—he didn't have it. But he was a fine man, one of the finest men. Not saying it because he's my daddy, but he was one of the finest men that I ever knew. And I've told here at the church and everywhere I've been, I can truthfully say I've never heard my daddy swear an oath in my life. And I never saw my daddy take a drink of liquor. I never saw my daddy drink a can of beer. He did chew tobacco up till he got sick, and then he quit chewing tobacco. But outside of that, that's all I've ever seen my daddy do. My mother, I never saw her take a drink of liquor, never heard her swear an oath in my life. And I just had wonderful parents. I thank God for that tonight. I praise God that my parents were that way.

Then after we got married we went on our own, and mother cried when I told her I was going to get married. She hated to see us leave home. Course Pauline's mother and father hated to see her go, too, but still that goes along through life. People, when they meet together, and they fall in love with one another, next thing they think about's getting married. And which is a great step. Now the Bible teaches us that marriage is honorable, and the bed is undefiled. So God honors a marriage, but he wants it to be done through the Lord. Now I admire anybody when they get married in the Lord: in other words, both of 'em be Christians,

living for the Lord, and things will work out great. Now when me and my wife got married, neither one of us was Christian. We were going to church—we went to church—but when we got married, we didn't start off going to church right then. Went on a few years, and as I said, I got a job in Kingsport in 1941. I left that job and just jumped from place to place. I never seemed like could be satisfied; nowhere I went to work I was satisfied. I don't know why, but I guess I was just a country boy [laughs]. So I just jumped from place to place, and it seemed like I never could get ahead till finally at last I got old enough to realize and understand that I was going to have to settle down.

Well, I was living at the Tri-City airport. God blessed us with four children: my oldest son, J. C., then Wanda, my daughter, and then Buddy Wayne, and then Donny. We was living at the Tri-City airport at the Holston Institute. And Buddy Wayne took sick. Well, I wasn't living for the Lord. I had made a profession in earlier life, but I had failed. I didn't measure up to what I professed to be. And I took the boy to the doctor, and the doctor said he had a little bit of pneumonia, and give him medicine. Said he'll be all right. I took him back home and started giving him the medicine, and it went against him, seemed like. So I called another doctor in Blountville, Tennessee, Doctor MacDowell, and he came down and just as he walked in the doors he started shaking his head, and said, "There's no hope." And he told me what to do: just give him a little sweetened toddy and try to keep his buds stimulated and all. He wasn't hardly five years old.

And to make me realize and understand that I had been rebellioned against God, in not doing the will of God, I lived in this house that had a hallway from the living room all the way back to the kitchen and then each one was offset from the other. And I had that boy in my arms. Pauline, my wife, was in the kitchen, and she couldn't possibly see me. Or him. And I had him up in my arms when he was dying. And she screamed just as loud as she could scream, "Pray!" But, children, I couldn't pray. They was no way I could pray because there was sin in my life between me and God that I had not repented of.

And that began to haunt me then later. I didn't repent at that time. And it went on. Course the boy went on to meet the Lord, and I know beyond a shadow of

doubt that one day soon I can see him again. But I feel that that was the Lord dealing with me. Now some will say, "I don't believe that. I don't believe God works like that." But David, if you recall, studying in the Word of God, David said that he had committed adultery with this woman. And God took the child from David. He wouldn't let David keep that child because he'd committed adultery. And he had this woman's husband killed. He told Joab to put Uriah in the hottest part of the battle, put him out in the front line: "I want him killed." And he had Uriah killed trying to cover up David's mistake, David's meanness. And of course I hadn't done anything like that, but yet I feel that because I had made a profession and I had let down on God (I hadn't done what God wanted me to), I feel that God was bringing me to my knees. So after the boy was buried and everything and I went on, that was always on my mind. The Bible said, David said there'd be a sword in his house forever. Well there's a sword in my house forever that keeps me thinking about this, because Buddy Wayne, seemed like we loved him better than every child we had. And I don't know why; I never have been able to figure that out. But we really did love Buddy Wayne. So that would haunt me. By the nighttimes it would haunt me. And so, in time, to come through this terrible thing I tried drinking. I'd go and get whiskey and drink it. I'd drink beer. And I done a little bit of everything that I can think of, trying to get rid of that trouble that was in my heart. But it didn't help.

So we were living down next to Fordtown. Brother Milburn Morlock, a Jewish preacher,⁶¹ conducted a revival meeting at the Gray's Station, a little town over there called Gray's Station. He was in a tent revival on the school grounds. So we heard about it, and we went over there. And the first night we set out in the car, me and Pauline and the children, and wouldn't go inside the tent, but I could hear him. And Lord how that dealt with me that night when he made that altar call. I smoked cigarettes, I bit my fingernails, I twisted and squirmed because God was dealing with my heart.

Well, I didn't go to the altar that night. I went home and I tried to sleep, but my sleep was gone. I was just in trouble. So I went to work the next day. I'd promised God that night though if he would let me go to sleep, I made him a vow that I would go back to the tent the next night and get

right. So the next day I went on to work and I still had that burden. It was a burden; that's all it was—just a burden.

I went back home that evening when I got off from work. I went home and got dressed, and we went to the tent. And Brother Milburn Morlock preached that night. I'll never forget this as long as I live. I was sitting on the fifth row of seats back. He had chairs, folding chairs. And I set in the fifth row back from the front, from the preacher looking back on the left-hand side. And seemed like everything that preacher said he looked right at me and pointed the finger. Pointed at me. And of course I thought somebody'd told him something. "Lord, who's he been talking to?" But when he got the message over, I couldn't hardly wait for him to make that altar call. I wanted to get out of there and go to that altar so bad. And I'd already made a vow to God that I would fix things up with him. So I did. I went to that altar that night, and when I went, I meant business. I got on my knees and I prayed and I confessed. Everything I could think of was in my heart, I told it to the Lord. And I said, "Well Lord I've done all I know to do. Here I come, swim, sink, or drown, I'm a-coming to you. And Lord if I go down, I'm going down for you." And don't you know, the Lord saved me that night. And I've been saved ever since.

We was living down there then next to Fordtown, route 11, and I was working in Kingsport at that time, at the Mead Corporation again, which was years later. And when I got the job there that time and this happened to me, why, coming home one night from work—. Now a lot of people, and God knows I say this as lovingly as I know how to say it tonight: God calls men to preach the gospel. And I in times past had been rebellion against God, but when God saved me, then he started dealing with my heart to preach. Well I'll never forget, though, after I got saved, I went back to the Mead Corporation the next morning. Old Brother Fred Weston, he sung bass in the Movin' On Quartet, I was sitting up on skids and he come in the door and when he looked at me he said, "John, something's happened to you." And of course when he said that, I said, "Yes, Brother Fred, praise God, the Lord saved me." And we just had a good time. I come off of the skids, and we was just having a ball. Course he had prayed so much for me, and then after that then, every time I'd start talking or testifying or anything, they'd say, "John, I believe

God's calling you to preach." And of course, you know, I didn't want to preach.

Now since I said that, it takes me back to when I was in school. Teacher asked us one time, when I was about nine years old, "When you children grow up, what do you want to be?" And I told that teacher I wanted to be a truck driver and a preacher. Now to show you that you'll get your heart's desire, you can have it if you want it, I've been both of 'em. [Laughs.] I got saved, and of course I drove the truck before I got saved. I drove a tractor and trailer. The first tractor-trailer I ever drove was hauling milk out of Abington to Big Stone Gap, Virginia. I was hauling for the King brothers. They taught me how to drive. And I drove that tractor-trailer; that was my heart's desire.

Then of course I wanted to drive tankers. Which that was a tanker also, but that was hauling milk; I wanted to haul gas. Because when I was just a young boy, my daddy lived on a farm they called it Nalph Barnes'; the old man that owned it was Nalph Barnes, and daddy lived on this place. Well when Mr. Barnes would take off somewhere and go somewhere, he'd want us, me and my brothers, to come and watch his place, see. So we would sleep in the old wagon, in the crib-shed. And of a nighttimes those big red Texaco tractor and trailer gasoline tankers'd go through there, and them tires a-crying, and that's what I wanted to do, of course. But I told the teacher I wanted to be a tractor and trailer driver and a preacher. Well, I got to be both of them.

So I drove the truck first, and then after God saved me, he started dealing with my heart, like I said a moment ago, and everybody, every time I'd testify in church, or anything, they'd say, "John, I believe the Lord's calling you to preach." I said, "Well now if he does, I will." And me knowing all the time that he was. Well, I went on for a long time like that. And one night I was coming in home from work at the Mead; I was working the three-to-eleven shift. And when I got to within about a half a mile of home, why, I was praying, and talking to the Lord, crying, tears was running down my cheeks. So I decided to pull over to the side of the road. I had an old '42 Studebaker car. Pulled over to the side of the road, and I just laid down over the wheel and I said, "Lord, if it's preach, I'll go." And when I said that, brother it was just like if he'd have lifted that piano off the top of me. I mean that's how heavy I was burdened

down so. But when I said that, the load left.

And then I went to church, on prayer-meeting night, and I announced my calling. To preach the gospel. I told them that the Lord had called me. "Brother Milburn Morlock," I said, "the Lord's called me to preach." So he said, "Well, John, I want you to go with me Sunday, down in Goshen Valley." He said, "I have a Sunday evening appointment down there, and you can go down there and preach for me." I said, "All right, Brother Morlock, I'll go." Well, I went back home, and I got my Bible. We lived in a little old house behind her [Pauline's] mother and daddy, three-room house, and I got my Bible down and I started studying. And I never will forget this, either. I was studying about John, chapter fifteen, where it says, "I am the true vine, my father's the husband, and every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he purgeth it," and all, cast 'em into the fire and all. I took the whole chapter and I was going to—I just about had it memorized—and I was going down to show 'em what a great preacher John Sherfey was.

Well, honey, believe you me I did. I showed 'em what a great preacher I was. 'Cause when I got down there, and I'd studied so hard, you know, thinking surely that I can preach a great sermon, you know, and that being my first time ever getting up to preach. Brother Milburn Morlock and I, we went out in this old sagegrass field, sagegrass up to our belt. And after he opened up service and singing and prayer, he said, "Now I have a young preacher here with me today." And he said, "I'm very happy to have him." He said, "He was converted under our preaching not long ago, and God's called him to preach." And he said, "We have Brother John Sherfey here," and he said, "I want him to come and bring the message." Well, you know, I guess I just felt important. But I got up there to preach, and when I got up there I couldn't remember one verse in that whole chapter. I was in the awfulest shape you ever seen. And of course I started crying and testifying, telling 'em how I got saved and all of that, you know. But as far as preaching is concerned, I didn't do no preaching. And so then after I got through what little bit I had to say, I set down and turned it back to Brother Morlock and he preached. And he was a good preacher. I still love him, bless his heart. Anyway, we was coming back up the road that evening,

and he just looked over at me and said, "John, pray. It'll be all right." Oh I wish he'd have shut up his fist and hit me; it wouldn't have hurt any worse, you know? Me already in misery, and him telling me "Just pray, it'll be all right." [Laughs.]

But that learnt me one of the greatest lessons that I've ever indulged in in my life; not to depend on myself for nothing when I'm behind the pulpit. Trust the Lord. Put him in it. Because God's the one that called me to preach; and if God called me, God can preach me. Of course now I realize the Bible says study the word to show thyself approved, a workman rightly dividing the word of truth and not being ashamed. So I study the word, but I depend on the Lord when I get up here. When I get up to preach, I depend on the Lord, not John Sherfey. And not what little bit I know, because I don't know much. I didn't even get to the eighth-grade education. But the Lord has blessed me in my ministry, and I thank God for that. God blessed me to have a job, during all this time I been preaching, except in one time in Kingsport.

I'd got out of a job. I couldn't get a job nowhere. I'd held a revival meeting in North Bristol, in the Shiloh Freewill Baptist Church, a few months prior to this. And I still didn't have a job. And after our table was bare, we didn't have anything to put out to eat, and the children was home, and of course I got up and I prayed after midnight. And of course I was all the time talking to the Lord anyway. I've always been a praying man. I believe in prayer. And I was talking to the Lord after midnight about what to do, because we didn't have anything to cook. And something spoke to me about two o'clock in the morning and said, "Everything's all right."

Well, the next morning we got up, and she fixed what we had. That was it. Old brother in Bristol, a deacon in the church there in Bristol where I'd held the revival, Shiloh Freewill Baptist Church, and a good man, he came down by my house, and stopped down in the road and blowed his horn. And of course I went out to see what he wanted. I tried to get him to come in, and he says, "I can't." He says, "John, I'm here and I don't know why I'm here." So I kept talking to him, you know, got in the car and set down with him, and we set there and talked, just about church, and church working, and his job. And of course we talked on awhile. And he said, "Well, John, I've got to go. I've got a job in Kingsport; I've just got to get down

there." And so he handed me a ten-dollar bill. Well, I started rejoicing when he gave me that ten-dollar bill. And I said, "Brother Ike [Blalock], you don't understand." I said, "We don't have anything in the house to fix, to cook." And I said "This will put some food on my table." And I was rejoicing, you know. And he said, "Give me that back." And so I handed it back to him, and he wrote me a check for twenty-five dollars. And he went on down the road rejoicing, and I went back in the house rejoicing. And that just proves that God will take care of you. And of course, as I've said, we've been poor all our lives, and we're still poor. But I'm happy in the Lord.

Language and Family

Language both initiates the act of conversion (that is, the sinner hears the gospel from a preacher) and accomplishes it (that is, through the sinner's prayer). The word has the power to transform. It can bless the believer and convict the sinner. Further, the Bible is the word of God, and Christ is the Word. The world was created by God's words "Let there be . . ." The power of the word is therefore an enacting power, a power to bring things about—all, of course, in the heart and mind of the believer. The world does not change, but the believer's perception of it changes.

Conversion is the archetype: it is not the world which is converted, but the person. The power of the word is, finally, a power which brings coherence and order: an interpretative power.

For Brother John and the members of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, and for millions of like-minded Baptists and Pentecostals throughout the United States, the Word is the outstanding symbol of belief. At the same time, language conveys that belief through the expressive act of worship. Something *happens* to language when it is thought, spoken, chanted, or sung in this religious context: it is led by the Spirit and filled with the power to transform. The subject

and object of the transformation is the community of believers, who address one another in the church as "brother" and "sister" and who look forward to spending eternity in heaven as the children of God, face to face with their brother Jesus. The family, then, serves as the controlling metaphor for this utopia. Language in religious practice establishes the brotherhood of believers on earth even as it prefigures the community of the church in heaven.

Notes

1. The book is under advance contract to the University of Texas Press.

2. Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 23–31, 137. Popular southern Protestantism's dominant trait is "voluntarism, stressing the central place of individual decision in all stages of the life of faith" (p. 14).

3. Jesse Comer, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 21 July 1977, Phleburg (near Comertown), Virginia, pp. 11–12. (Page references are to transcribed typescripts of each interview, on deposit at the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and the Folklore Archives, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)

4. Indeed, the church members seldom term it a *sermon*, but instead call it a *message* (implying that it has been sent by God).

5. See, e.g., Hill, *Southern Churches*; Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787–1805* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972).

6. See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, ed. Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

7. Jeff Todd Titon, "Some Recent Pentecostal Revivals: A Report in Words and Photographs," *Georgia Review* 32 (1978): 579–605; Jeff Titon, "Son House: Two Narratives," *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 2, no. 1 (1976): 2–9; Jeff Titon and Ken George, "Dressed in the Armor of God," *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 3, no. 2 (1977): 10–31 (includes

the texts of several narratives and a sermon by Brother John Sherfey); Jeff Titon and Ken George, "Testimonies," *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 4, no. 1 (1978): 68–83 (includes the texts of several narratives by Brother John Sherfey and other members of the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church). See also, Kenneth M. George, "'I Still Got It': The Conversion Narrative of John C. Sherfey," M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1978.

8. This is an urban black congregation. The pastor is the Reverend C. L. Franklin, father of the singer Aretha Franklin.

9. *Page County, Virginia, Overall Economic Development Program* (Luray: Page County Board of Supervisors, 1977), p. 5.

10. Bernard Spittler, interviewed by Jeff Titon, Stanley, Virginia, 18 July 1977. The interview was not tape-recorded. The incident is reported also in Harry M. Strickler, *A Short History of Page County* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1952), p. 248.

11. Some of the families were settled in homesteads in the valleys, constructed at government expense. Of the twenty families resettled in the Ida Valley Homesteads in Page County between 1936 and 1946, only one remained as of 1952 (Strickler, *Short History*, p. 252).

12. *Development Program*, p. 3.

13. See, e.g., the Panorama Realty advertisement in the August 1977 issue of *Skyline*. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare calls Page "one of the healthiest spots in America."

14. Rastus Lam, interviewed by Jeff Titon and Ken George, 8 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, p. 31.

15. A recent treatment of this pattern is Richard D. Brown, *Modernization* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).

16. Hear, e.g., John Sherfey's story of his promise to his dying brother in the sermon on this album. (For transcription, see below, p. 16.)

17. John Sherfey, interviewed by Ken George, 28 July 1975, Falls Church, Virginia, pp. 22–23.

18. See Hill, note 2; C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

19. Of special importance was the ministry of Brother Gerdon A. Cave, who traveled throughout the backwoods of Page and Madison counties, preaching for more than fifty years until his death around 1970. Many stories about him are in the oral tradition in the region where he lived and preached.

20. John Sherfey and Pauline Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon and Ken George, 14 August 1977, Luray, Virginia, pp. 16–17; John Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 3 December 1979, Stanley, Virginia, pp. 20–24, and 18 August 1980, Stanley, Virginia (from notes).

21. On Baptist doctrine, Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1967) has been most useful.

22. See note 20.

23. Based on Randall's journal (no longer extant) and quoted from John Buzzell, *The Life of Elder Benjamin Randall* (Limerick, Maine, 1827), p. 21.

24. For the particulars of Freewill Baptist doctrine and history, I have drawn most heavily on Norman Allen Baxter, *History of the Freewill Baptists* (Rochester: American Baptist Historical Society, 1957). A group calling themselves the Original Freewill Baptists was founded in 1727 in North Carolina and is not to be confused with the denomination that

Randall originated.

25. These rules are contained in the church bylaws.

26. Vernie Meadows, interviewed by Jeff Titon and Ken George, 15 July 1977, Pine Grove, Virginia, p. 19.

27. "Ultimate concern" is Paul Tillich's influential definition; see his *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 1–29. On the "death of God" theme, see *The New Christianity*, ed. William Robert Miller (New York: Dell, 1967).

28. John Sherfey, life story, 23 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia. See below, p. 21.

29. As reported by Goldie Dove and Alan Dove, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 4 August 1977, Timberville, Virginia, pp. 1, 4; also recorded on "Back to the Light of Life" aircheck, 16 April 1972. This was (and is) how Brother John invites people over the radio.

30. *Church Hymnal* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Tennessee Music and Printing Co., 1951). This hymnal is widely used among rural Baptist denominations in the South and regions of out-migration.

31. The titles listed were those sung most frequently during the period from 26 June through 14 August 1977.

32. Rastus Lam, interviewed by Jeff Titon and Ken George, 8 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, p. 21.

33. Spoken by Edith Cubbage, at the Sunday morning service, 3 July 1977.

34. See, e.g., Cartwright, *Autobiography*, pp. 75, 199–200, 222.

35. John Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 23 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, pp. 23–24. He remembers the altar prayer from his childhood churchgoing.

36. Jesse Comer, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 21 July 1977, Phleburg, Virginia, p. 13.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8, 14–15.

38. See below, pp. 13–17.
 39. Don was born in 1950; he fibbed about his age.
 40. See Loyal Jones, "Buell Kazee," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* 14 (1978): 57–67.
 41. John Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 17 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, pp. 11–12.
 42. John Sherfey plays guitar, but not well enough to accompany his vocals without compromising the singing. At the Sunday night services, Sister Beatrice Hughes accompanies the singing on piano.
 43. John Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 23 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, p. 14.
 44. Jesse Comer, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 21 July 1977, Phleburg, Virginia, p. 16.
 45. She volunteered this information after a prayer meeting on 26 July 1977; her conversation was not tape-recorded.
 46. Belvin Hurt, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 11 August 1977, Etlan, Virginia, p. 134.
 47. Old thing, i.e., physical body.
 48. This is a good illustration of the non-denominational emphasis that the church puts on salvation. Brother John will sometimes say, "People call me Pentecostal. Well, I am; I got what they got at the day of Pentecost. Some say I sing like an Old Regular Baptist [and he does]. Well, I do; I go to church regular. I tell you it makes no difference whether you're saved Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, or whatever. It's whether you're saved that counts."
 49. After hearing the recording of this sermon, Brother John remarked that he meant First Corinthians, chapter thirteen, verse nine.
 50. John and Pauline's son Buddy Wayne, who died at age five. Hear the full narrative in Brother Sherfey's life story, side 4 of this album.
 51. John's brother, Ester Sherfey.
 52. James McNally, husband of Elsie Sherfey McNally.
 53. John's wife, Pauline Sherfey. An ethnopoetic transcription of the following vision may be found in Titon and George, "Testimonies," pp. 82–83.
 54. See note 50.
 55. Elsie was ill at the time.
 56. Beatrice Hughes.
 57. John's son, Don Sherfey. The song is Don's choice to accompany the altar-call invitation.
 58. John Sherfey, interviewed by Jeff Titon, 23 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia, p. 26.
 59. Edith Cubbage, interviewed by Jeff Titon and Ken George, 12 August 1977, Stanley, Virginia, p. 34.
 60. I began with this question, not knowing whether Brother John would be able to speak continuously. He does not mention his birth date in the life story that follows, but it was 6

April 1923. The transcript has been edited for reading continuity by excising many of the repetitions and false starts which can be heard on the record but which would clutter the page.

61. He said later he meant that one of Morlock's parents was Jewish.

Recording Data

All recorded during worship services at the Fellowship Independent Baptist Church, Stanley, Virginia, unless indicated otherwise. (JTT: recorded by Jeff Titon; KMG: recorded by Ken George.)

SIDE 1

1. "Nothing but the Blood." Hymn, led by John Sherfey. 9 April 1978 (JTT).
2. "Meet Me There." Hymn, led by John Sherfey. 9 April 1978 (JTT).
3. Altar prayer, led by Jesse Comer. 14 August 1977 (JTT and KMG).
4. Sunday school (excerpt), led by Jesse Comer. 2 April 1978 (JTT).
5. Birthday, led by John Sherfey. 24 July 1977 (JTT and KMG).
6. "I Shall Not Be Moved" and "This Little Light of Mine" (medley). Special hymn, sung by Denise Sherfey, Tammy Sherfey, and Missy Owens. 14 August 1977 (JTT and KMG).
7. "I'm So Glad He Found Me." Special hymn, sung by Betty Cave (lead), Arthur Cave (high tenor), Welford Cave (low tenor), Rosalee Cave. 17 July 1977 (JTT and KMG).

SIDE 2

1. "Preaching by the Roadside." Special hymn, sung after morning services by John Sherfey and Pauline Sherfey. 3 July 1977 (JTT and KMG).
2. "The Little Church Aisle." Special hymn, sung on "Bible Way Gospel Time" (Brother

Sherfey's radio ministry) by Belvin Hurt and Delores Hurt Fincham. 24 July 1977. WRAA radio studios, Luray, Virginia (JTT and KMG).

3. "Precious Memories." Special hymn, sung by John Sherfey (lead), Elsie Sherfey McNally (alto), and Don Sherfey (bass). 10 July 1977. (JTT and KMG).

4. "I Saw the Face of Jesus." Special hymn, sung on "Bible Way Gospel Time" by Betty Cave (lead), Arthur Cave (high tenor), Welford Cave (low tenor), Rosalee Cave. 24 July 1977. WRAA radio studios, Luray, Virginia (JTT and KMG).

5. Healing prayer, led by John Sherfey. 7 August 1977 (JTT and KMG).

6. Testimony, spoken by Edith Cubbage. 9 April 1978 (JTT).

SIDE 3

1. Sermon, invitation, and prayer, by John Sherfey. 7 August 1977 (JTT and KMG).

SIDE 4

1. Life story, spoken by John Sherfey. Stanley, Virginia, 23 July 1977 (JTT).

Fellowship Independent Baptist Church Documentary Project List of Tape Recordings, December 1971–December 1979

(Index numbers refer to original tapes in author's collection.)

Worship Services, each in their entirety (ca. three hours).

1. 28 July 1975. Morning service. No index number.
2. 11 July 1976. Morning service. No index number.
3. 13 March 1977. Morning service. No index number.
4. 26 June 1977. Night service. S2, S3.
5. 3 July 1977. Morning service. S8, S9, S10.
6. 3 July 1977. Night service. S14, S15.
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18. 5 March 1978. Morning service. No index number.
19. 2 April 1978. Morning service. F78-1, F78-2, F78-3.
20. 2 April 1978. Night service. F78-2, F78-3, F78-5.
21. 9 April 1978. Morning service. F78-12, F78-13, F78-14.
22. 9 April 1978. Night service. F78-14, F78-15, F78-16.
23. 2 December 1979. Morning Service. F79-1, F79-2, F79-3.
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1. 28 June 1977. S4, S5.
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3. 12 July 1977. S30, S31.
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6. 9 August 1977. S90, S91.

Studio Recordings, WRAA Radio Broadcasts, Luray, Virginia

1. "Back to the Light of Life" (John Sherfey), ten one-hour radio broadcasts, December 1971—summer 1972, airchecks recorded by Cameron Nickels. 71/6/RA—72/11/RA.
2. "Bible Way Gospel Time" (John Sherfey), 26 June 1977. S1.

3. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 3 July 1977. S11.
4. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 10 July 1977. S26.
5. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 17 July 1977. S39, S40.
6. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 24 July 1977. S56.
7. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 31 July 1977. S65.
8. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 6 August 1977. S79.
9. "Bible Way Gospel Time," 13 August 1977. S113.

Conversations and Interviews.

1. John Sherfey. 28 July 1975, Falls Church, Virginia. No index number.
2. John Sherfey. 9 July 1976, Falls Church, Virginia. No index number.
3. Rastus Lam. 8 July, 1977. Stanley, Virginia. S19, S20.
4. John Sherfey and Belvin Hurt. 3 July 1977, Luray, Virginia. S12.
5. Thurston Hughes. 12 July 1977, Luray, Virginia. S29.
6. Vernie Meadows. 15 July 1977, Pine Grove, Virginia. S32.
7. Don Sherfey and Charles Sherfey. 17 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S32.
8. John Sherfey. 17 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S35.
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10. Tom Breedon. 4 August 1977, Luray, Virginia. S32.
11. Allen Dove and Goldie Dove. 4 August 1977, Timberville, Virginia. S51, S89.
12. John Sherfey. 23 July 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S50.
13. Josie Sherfey, Elsie Sherfey McNally, Archie Jenkins, George Cave. 7 August 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S80, S81.
14. Janice Turner. 9 August 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S89.
15. Belvin Hurt. 11 August 1977, Etlan, Virginia. S92, S93, S94, S95, S96.
16. Edith Cabbage and Clyde Cabbage, 12 August 1977, Stanley, Virginia. S97.

17. John Sherfey and Pauline Sherfey, 14 August 1977, Luray, Virginia. S101.
18. John Sherfey. 2 April 1978, Stanley, Virginia. F78-6.
19. Earl Turner and Ella Turner. 8 April 1978, Stanley, Virginia. F78-10.
20. Betty Cave, Welford Cave, Arthur Cave, Rosalee Cave. 4 April 1978, Etlan, Virginia. F78-9.
21. Roy Steven Cabbage. 8 April 1978, Lucas Hollow, Virginia. F78-11.
22. John Sherfey. 3 December 1979, Stanley, Virginia. F79-6.

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