

John's Education

You will search in vain to find any reference on my web sites or blogs to my graduating from a college, university or seminary. That is because it never happened. And here is the story behind that fact.

I graduated from high school in 1971. I went to Georgia Tech in Atlanta for 8 quarters as a Mechanical Engineering major. I was doing very poorly academically. The first two years of calculus nearly destroyed my grade point average. And most of the rest of the classes assumed I knew how to use calculus to solve their problems. I had repeatedly asked my father for permission to change majors to Management or transfer to another engineering school that was more practical or field oriented. He was paying the bills.

In my junior year I decided to not return to school until I got a clear direction for my life. Along came a New Age cult named Arica. I joined the cult for less than a year. There followed drug abuse and then Christian rehabilitation. Much of this is presented in my salvation testimony here <http://tinyurl.com/d4ots>

By the grace of God I was born again on January 16, 1977 at 23 years old. Shortly after that I felt the call of God on my life. My pastor in the Assemblies of God recommended that I complete my bachelor's degree where many of those in his church were going to school. So I attended Houston Baptist University. The school was liberal. What the professors said about the authority of the Bible was unlike what the radio preachers were saying. For example one professor (that was the head of the Christianity department) said in class that the Bible is full of myths, fairy tales and legends. It has no application for today. When others raised their hands to object he said he would not have any discussion. I reported this to the academic dean who said they knew. As a brand new believer I was very thirsty for Bible doctrine. I did not want to graduate with a contaminated faith. So I attended for only 2 quarters and did not graduate.

I began to pray long and hard. This went on for many months. My whole heart and mind were centered on finding the will of God for my life. Jesus Christ had delivered me from pornography, promiscuity, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, a cult and a liberal college. The Lord put a call on my life that I could not deny.

I left the church where I was born again and joined a church founded by a former missionary. I greatly enjoyed the continual parade of missionaries presenting to the congregation week after week. There were several places on the grounds for them to live for a short while before going back to the mission field. During the services I always sat near the front, took many notes. I would surrender my life to go to the mission field whenever the invitation was made. I prayed many times with the director of missions in his office for God to guide me. I had been a zealot from the time of my conversion a few years earlier.

This was an independent charismatic church. The emphasis was on following the leading of the Holy Spirit. There was no assumption that a person going to the mission field first needed to get any academic credentials. Most of the missionaries who shared their stories had felt a clear call of God to go to a country and just went there. God prospered them spiritually and financially due to their obedience.

What I lacked was a God-given burden for a specific country. I was fully expecting to have a mountaintop kind of experience in prayer or worship. During that epiphany God would clearly communicate His direction to me about where to go. This happened to many (but not all) the missionaries that came to that church. After many months of prayer this did not happen. So I moved from the noise of Houston to a quite small town just south of there named Pearland.

My spiritual education continued there for the next few years. I had ordinary jobs at places like at a hamburger joint, machine shop and feed store. During all my time off I would read the Bible and pray. I marked up my Bible extensively. I used an exhaustive concordance to do word studies. I became familiar with what the Bible said apart from the ideas of preachers or commentators. I recall countless long walks calling out to God with all my heart. I was seeking the face of God with all my might. I did not know how long I would be there. I came to get a vision for my life from God. And some of the concepts that are expressed in Four Bridges Ministry began to come into my mind and heart at that time.

When I went to the small town I fully expected to leave with a burning desire to relocate in a foreign country. I was shocked that the country God put on my heart was the USA. After a short while I knew this was from God. Note that this was back in the early 1980s. Ronald Regan had recently been elected president of the USA. The country was just starting into the era of excesses and conspicuous consumption. I had read the Bible enough to know that this would end in disaster. The book of Ecclesiastes is full of warnings and insights that are conveniently neglected both then and now.

While a member of the missionary oriented church I used their tape library extensively. I could never afford to buy the dozens of tapes I borrowed each month. This was during the early days of the health, wealth and prosperity doctrine. What I did not have was a solid foundation for my faith. There was no internal frame of reference for the various sermons and Bible lessons.

Into this vacuum the Lord Jesus Christ brought R. B. Thieme <http://www.rbthieme.org/> He was an independent fundamentalist Bible teacher who graduated from DTS in 1950. He was the pastor of a church in Houston. And let me quote from his web site, "He has recorded more than eleven thousand hours of lectures covering much of the Bible verse-by-verse. He has written more than a hundred books and pamphlets on various subjects including salvation, spirituality, the Christian way of life, the essence of God, biblical history, Satan and the angelic conflict, and prophecy."

Then let me quote his financial policy which God used to transform my life "There is no charge for any material from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries. Anyone who desires Bible teaching can receive our books and recordings without obligation. God provides Bible doctrine. We wish to reflect His grace."

At no cost or obligation I received all his books and hundreds of hours of his tapes. God used this to lay a solid foundation for my faith. I was delighted to learn that Bible doctrines are understandable when taken only from the Bible. Each doctrine is important and each one relates to every other one. When I saw his line drawing kind of illustrations <http://www.rbthieme.org/illustra.htm> I knew that this was of God. Previously I could not reconcile the order and patterns found in physics, biology, anatomy, chemistry, etc. with the foggy views of truth that most preachers seemed to present. There is a very real and knowable foundation of theology that the Bible presents directly and indirectly.

Christian radio has been a constant companion from 1976 until today. I have the radio turned on most of the time at home or in the car. I would estimate that much more than half of my understanding of Christianity came from radio teachers and songs. During times of difficulty the Holy Spirit has anointed certain familiar or unfamiliar songs to minister deeply to my soul.

When I was a new believer I was treated like everyone else that attended the mega church. There were Sunday school classes to attend and various services on Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday night. There was no such option as a "new believers" or "new member's" class. They just presumed that everyone understood the terminology and concepts. I was much disoriented. I struggled to get my bearings for a long time. And during that painful time I committed to reach back and serve those coming behind me. I would create, produce and distribute modules for new believers. For many years I sifted all

that I was exposed to through the filter of how this can contribute to teaching new believers. Ever since those early years I have kept that orientation of a teacher and educator.

While I was in Pearland I began a habit that has stuck with me until this time. I invested many hours each week in the library. I went there at first because it was quiet. I could study better there than at home. When I got stiff or tired from Bible study I would get up to stretch my legs. As I walked around the library I sampled all kinds of materials. The magazines and books on photography gave a nice relief. Gradually I began to take home some books. Mostly these dealt with business management and marketing. Later I borrowed material on nonprofit management and fund raising.

I have attended dozens of fund raising seminars lasting from one hour, to half a day to a week. I have a large box of my notes from those experiences. But they all assume that you have an established organization that just needs improvements. (This is unlike my pre-start up status.) I believe that after the web platform is in place I will be able to implement the dozens of lessons I have learned over the years.

I have read dozens of self help kinds of books. I have attended hundreds of 12 step recovery meetings both secular and Christian. I have been to various seminars and workshops. If I had more money then I would have attended many more.

I love to learn various subjects. I most enjoy learning with a group that is going through a workbook. I have borrowed hundreds of videos from the seminary library where I work. I subscribe to Netflix www.netflix.com and often borrow from them DVDs that are documentaries, biographies and nature shows.

The most fascinating subject for me is the way plants and animals interact in an ecosystem like a coral reef, alpine meadow, marsh, swamp, tidal pool, etc. For me that demonstrates the genius of God in bringing these various species together in a symbiotic system that is self sustaining. In many ways the design of Four Bridges is just an imitation of my Heavenly Father's handiwork in ecosystems.

Hundreds of times I have thought about going back to school to get a degree. But then questions arise like 1) what major, 2) how to pay for it and 3) what purpose? It has been very hard to choose just one area in which to get a degree. I think in an interdisciplinary way. Every area of life interfaces with many others. Very few schools offer a degree in interdisciplinary studies. I do not wish to go deeply into debt through student loans without the very strong guidance from God. And He has not given that. Because the 10 quarters were in different majors it will take me about 2 years full time or much longer part time to graduate.

A few years ago I applied to attend the seminary where I work. The rules said that I needed an undergraduate degree or take an exam like the GRE. I scored in the 91% but they denied my application. Later I gathered more references and more essays to show that I have been self taught. They denied me again. They pointed me to get an undergraduate degree.

Today I have zero motivation to attend an undergraduate school. I have prayed and many have prayed for me. God has never led me for one moment to go back down that path. Mostly this is because I am absolutely sure that God has called me to pioneer a work in cyberspace. On the Internet academic credentials are not necessary. Anyone can say anything on any topics without any proof. Into that chaos and anarchy the only true God that is revealed by faith based on the scripture has called me to establish a spiritual oasis.

My on-going education occurs as I prepare modules and presentations for Four Bridges and coach seminary students and graduates one-on-one. In any classroom it is the teacher who is learning the most.