

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Charles H. Dawson (CN 386, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words that were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was made by Wayne D. Weber and Hannah Parish and was completed in January 2011.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

Collection 386, Tape 1. Oral history interview of Charles H. Dawson by Robert Shuster, February 22, 1988.

SHUSTER: This is an interview of Rev. Charles Dawson by Robert Shuster for the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place on February 22, 1988 in Rev. Dawson's home at 10AM. Rev. Dawson why don't you tell me a little bit about your family life and your childhood. Where were you born?

DAWSON: I was born in Riverton, New Jersey, in 1916 and was of a family of eight. Godly father and Godly mother. And we started Sunday school about six years of age right about the time we started public school. And that went on until, I guess, until I was about fourteen or fifteen and we sort of got away from Sunday school but we'd go to church intermittently. And then at the age of twenty I gave my heart to the Lord.

SHUSTER: What were your parents' names?

DAWSON: My...

SHUSTER: What were your parents' names?

DAWSON: Oh. James Henry Dawson and Betty James Dawson and they were both from Virginia (just giving you a little bit about their background). And they were just God fearing people, they loved the Lord and...and feared the Lord and though they did not have Bible training as we know it today what they knew they practiced, you know, like we never had a meal that we didn't thank the Lord for the food. We prayed in the morning and in the evening, you know, and there were times that I would read the scriptures and that sort of things. Go to church together and come back and I would imitate the preacher [laughs].

SHUSTER: How do you mean you'd imitate the preacher.

DAWSON: You know I'd just go over the message. You know, we would play church at home. I don't know whether you've ever done that or not but this was happening in a lot of the black homes. Maybe the deacon that prayed or someone that could sing well you just sort of rehearsed what you had heard in Sunday school and church that particular morning, you know.

SHUSTER: What was your congregation when you...who did you preach to when you were...?

DAWSON: My father...this was at home, you know, when we would go over it, you know. We had a close-knit family. My father, for instance, could play the harmonica or guitar and we just had a...had a close family ties just wonderful. And I...I thank God for the...our background, you know, and.... We would get along as a group, you know, father, mother, and brothers and sisters and I was just...just excited I was born into the Dawson family. We never had much of anything but we had the love of God, we had the love of parents, and a love for one another. This is what we were indoctrinated in, just always love one another. Wherever you are, you manifest that, that's about the way we lived.

SHUSTER: What did you father do?

DAWSON: My father did a laboring job. He, of course, was mechanically inclined but in those days it was difficult for a black man to get a job with any skills but as the years went by, Kina Knox they operated machines if the machines broke down they could fix them up and what...(he never went to school for it). God given talent. And he was raised up in Virginia why...on his side they would follow the water, fisherman, oystering, crabbing, culling and that sort of thing. They learned how to make the boats (this was what my dad did) and then I became a man I was in the shipyard as a ship fitter. That was like a second or third generation. But they always supposed to use their hands never be afraid of work and treat people right and so on and that's...that's the way we were brought up, you know. If anybody came to our house with nothing to eat they'd always have a place stay and something to eat. Always found love there. That was something of the part of the warp and woof of our bringing up, you know.

SHUSTER: Why did your parents move up to New Jersey from Virginia?

DAWSON: Well, I guess, one of the thing on the farm you get maybe, what do you call-sharecropping. They give maybe so much meat, so much flour and as far as money was concerned that was very small, very...so the pickings were better in the North where the industry was greater. Places like Campbell Soup, RCA, and construction and I guess my father did some of...he was very, very versatile, he was equipped to do a lot of things and he did and we're grateful to the Lord. And he told us how to do things, make wagons, we were always industrious, you know, that was just a part of the background. And our grandchildren today, [laughs] teach them how to use their hands, work with tools.... I've got two grandsons right down the street and I can ask them for any kind of tool and they know exactly what kind I want and then I'm teaching them how to use these tools. How to use a square, how to use a level and whatever else that they might need in life. So we had a good, good background. And then my father was a man that was easy to get along with.

SHUSTER: How do you mean that?

DAWSON: He was just congenial, affable, pleasant, friendly, you know some people are irritable, you know, especially poor people, if you don't have anything what's there to be happy about? He said, "As long as you have something in what you call your suitcase, you know, you'd feel good everyday."

SHUSTER: Meaning your stomach?

DAWSON: Stomach, yes. He called it your suitcase, you know [laughs]. You got your suitcase full, you know, you can't hardly be angry with the world if you're satisfied in the inside. And then if you have the Lord its even better yet, right?

SHUSTER: Did your father talk with you about Christ?

DAWSON: Well, we talked together about the things of the Lord. The family like I said when we were kids going to Sunday school why every part of our conversation...when we went to church



and came back we rehearsed what went on, you know, like the preaching, the singing, the prayers, or whatever. Some of the humorous things, you know...[laughs] we, we used to rehearsed it like, like after I got in Bible school he'd ask me questions on the Bible and we'd discuss it. Like he would take me out to where I was born in the country down in...up in Riverton, New Jersey. Said, "You were born in a, in a farmhouse," he did farm work for maybe [pauses] maybe ten years before we moved into Camden. We were born up there, I think, I think my father said I was a year old when we came to Camden so all I know is Camden. I know where I was born and so on but I know...I know no one up there in the vicinity. But he worked on the farm for possibly ten years and came to Camden, he worked in the coal yard, with the Campbell Soup, with the construction work and worked at Kina Knox Jello and as far as longevity there wasn't too many jobs you could get that would last [phone rings] maybe a lifetime...it wasn't that way at all. We went through the depression days, that was a heavier time but it was rough but I'm glad I came through it.

SHUSTER: Now did your mother have to work too?

DAWSON: No, mother she did housework. My mother, you know, if you have eight children, right... [laughs].

SHUSTER: Takes up all your time.

DAWSON: Oh yeah, you can't work. My father worked and that and we come along the same way say if you get a good wife, a godly wife, a Christian girl, he emphasized a Sunday school teacher. That's what I have. [Shuster laughs] That's right!

SHUSTER: It's who you marry.

DAWSON: That's right. My wife is a Sunday school teacher, graduated from Bible school, together we worked from 1942 up to now, that's about forty-six years, and...or combined ninety-two years of Christian ministry. But the background was in our home that's where it came from.

SHUSTER: How would you describe your mother?

DAWSON: Well, she was a devout person, she feared the Lord, good singer, good cook, and she and my father were very combat...compatible. Never heard them argue in my life, never. I say that before the Lord I never...I say if they'd argued they must have gone out in the woods about...in the city about three in the morning before we got up. Never. They got along very well. And the wife and I the same way. We've never had an argument.

SHUSTER: Praise the Lord.

DAWSON: There's nothing that...I've never missed a meal because of dissension or friction. You know whether or not it's always settled before we get to this or go to bed. The Bible says *Let not the sun go down on your wrath* [Ephesians 4:26] yeah. But my foundation, my, my best training that I had was right in that home. I've said this many times one of my best teachers of all was my

Daddy. He, he taught me how, how to live and my mother she taught me how to give, how to treat people. And I got that at home, you know, and that's because of that Bible background. And not that they were Bible scholars, my father would say, "If you go to church whenever the preacher preaches you get some kernel of truth." That's about the way he would. I'm quoting him verbatim there. We'd talk about that kernel of truth, we would discuss it, you know, and to the best of our ability that's the way we were basically raised, you know. Because you know, when you have godly parents it does something for you. I'd give anything in the world to help my father and mother as I was coming along. And that's the one reason I didn't graduate from college. I had a full scholarship to Southern University, but during the Depression they seemed to have it rough and I thought they needed me at home. And I haven't lost anything by it, God has blessed all the way.

SHUSTER: When you were growing up during the depression, did you also have to work when you were a kid?

DAWSON: Shoe shines, papers, selling papers, selling...you know what snowballs are?

SHUSTER: Yes.

DAWSON: You have a....shining shoes. Any way you could make an honest nickel or dime. You wouldn't say bucks, cause there wasn't many of them around. And we always worked. Running errands for people, helping people to cook, working with the huckster fellow selling fresh vegetables and fruit during the summer. Maybe they could probably give you fifty cents a day and all the fruit you could eat. That sort of thing.

SHUSTER: Did you have any steady job during that time?

DAWSON: No. I don't think I got a steady job until I was about... I would saved, then I must have been around...I believe almost twenty-four. Nobody would seem to hire me. And then once I found a job, nobody wanted to fire me. From one extreme to the other... my wife will tell you that when I went to start working I enjoyed working cause I was taught to work and I loved it. And even today I'll get out in the field and in between. I always stay out in the woods there maybe an hour, two hours almost every day. So I guess the work we're committed...until sickness, until death, you know, the work is number one. But I've always been ... and that's just... I like the out of doors and I'm not an office man...I like to always... I enjoy working for my father. He said, "Working never hurt you. Increase your appetite, your stability, your power. Give you something worth working for. Just... just... and learn how to get along with people." And something else he told me, he'd say, "Son, you just have the gift of getting along with folk." And I watched wherever I go, all over...we've been many parts of the States and different parts of the world, and we've never had any problems getting along with folk. H-O-M-E. That's where it came from. And I think that's where it really begins, don't you?

SHUSTER: Yes.



DAWSON: Yeah. The Bible says, *Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* [Proverbs 22:6] And what they knew they passed on to us. We learned how to cook. I can do anything around the house, other than have a baby [laughs].

SHUSTER: Can't teach you that.

DAWSON: No, no. Anything around the... you name it, I can do. Cause we were poor. Shopping, cleaning the house, taking care of my younger brothers and sisters, helping my father with whatever chores he gave me. But there's a rule. Whatever the chores my mother wanted me to do. She used to do a lot of washing, so I had to go pick up the washing. When she finished the washing and ironing, I had to take it back. That was my job. And my schedule was so tight, I wonder how I did it all and then participated in sports too. But when you're young you've got a lot of energy, and you're not afraid of work or anything else. Why, you can do it by God's will. He gave me a strong body, strong mind, determination, perseverance, and that sort of thing. I don't know what it is to quit. You know cause... I just hang in there. I don't know what it is to quit.

SHUSTER: Are your brothers and sisters the same way?

DAWSON: No. I guess I was...my sister, my oldest sister, she's suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She was always really industrious working, but I was always like the leader in the family. You know....

SHUSTER: You were the oldest boy in the family?

DAWSON: I was the oldest boy. And I have a sister that's three years older than I am. And she's the one today that's suffering from Alzheimer's. She's physically strong but you know, not the proper blood circulations.

SHUSTER: Did...do all your... did everyone in your family become a Christian?

DAWSON: I think they're all Christian, but nominal. Not as committed or dedicated. That's what we always prayed for. Just the same thing on my wife's side. But we still lived a model life before them. Wherever we go, wherever I work in the industry, I'm there to represent Christ. I'm not there just to do these work...and I do the work. Because above all I'm just His ambassador. My eye's on Him, my eye's on the Throne, my eye's on Heaven. And I want as many folk to get in Christ as we can possibly persuade to do so.

SHUSTER: When were you born again?

DAWSON: 1937. I was about twenty years of age.

SHUSTER: How...how did it happen?

DAWSON: Well, interesting I get. An old deacon came around, couldn't read or write, but he knew the Lord. He didn't know Bible Scriptures as we would, but he'd bring it out in his own

words, he'd talk about men and women walking up and down the street that were dead. I couldn't get it. I think I'd read the Scriptures since I was about nine or ten, and I didn't know what he saw in the Bible but I knew that the people that he was referring to were men and women of the baser sort, gambling, gamblers, drunkards, and whoremongers. You just name it, whatever's out there. I'm not trying to belittle just was speaking about life in the world the way it is as I was brought up. And I never wanted that. I never want that. And then I got hurt about the same time. And this fellow came around... he was the first one that ever prayed for me by name before the Lord. He prayed for Charlie Dawson. And that night I went to bed I started thinking about heaven. He couldn't read or write but he knew the Lord. And he was a deacon in the church. You don't have to read and write, it's a matter of believing right? He really thought and trusted God. And it was through that influence I had made a note of up here Deacon Dunbar.

SHUSTER: That was his name?

DAWSON: Yeah. Deacon Dunbar. I've forgotten his first name, but Deacon Dunbar. And he chewed snuff or tobacco. That won't stop you from getting to heaven either, just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And all these habits that we have here, you know, before we get there, they'll be taken care of. If a man smokes, he'll be fumigated before he gets to glory. [Laughs] But it was through his witness and my desire to get to know the Lord and trust the Lord that I began reading the Scriptures. And little by little I began to exercise more faith in the Lord and finally came the time that I just committed myself to the Lord. And at that point I'm about twenty. So another white brother (I have his name down here too) Brother Hamilton, I don't know his first name. But he...no Bible...I mean, no basic training. Like maybe you brought up in the church were you had graded Sunday school lessons and all this nonsense. We didn't have that. But we had a Sunday school lesson that we asked questions back and forth. A fellow came around the corner where we were, I was in sports now around twenty years of age, and he began to talk about sin.

SHUSTER: Did he just pass by or....?

DAWSON: On the corner, street corner. There were about twenty kids, we're all athletes, you know. Talking...a bunch of them, anyway. There were twenty guys, there were fifteen athletes, and that was part of my background too. And he started talking about sin, and like I said I never had any Scripture training. I was...I was into boxing, so I got gloves, I got a book, and I went to the gym. And I got the basic train....

SHUSTER: You got a book on boxing?

DAWSON: Yeah, oh yeah. From a Christian, so where do you think I went now? I wanted something basic. And I heard this man talking about sin and how it started, and I didn't know the background of all that. I knew by nature all the sin was all that I could see around my neighborhood and wherever I went was sinful, wicked, ungodly, and unclean people. Once in a while, you'd see someone really different. But the general run of things was bad. And as this brother talked about the Lord, I'm confident God had me on that corner for a reason. As he finished his discourse and witnessing and this sort of thing, I call him a personal working. Because God used that man to reach me, to direct me to Bible school. And I went up to him (we call him Pop Hamilton) and I



said, "Mr. Hamilton, how could I get some more of what you just shared with us?" And he directed me to the New Jersey Bible Training School. And that was the beginning of it all.

SHUSTER: Was that a school that he'd been to or....?

DAWSON: His pastor taught there. And I'm now the pastor of the church that his former pastor relinquished about maybe, oh, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years ago.

SHUSTER: And what was his pastor's name?

DAWSON: Hmmm?

SHUSTER: What was his pastor's name?

DAWSON: Newton Conan. I think it's Newton B. Conan. He's active today, he's about eighty-five! Yeah. Eighty...he's about eighty-five years of age. He's connected with the Biblical School of Theology. Do you know Jack Murray?

SHUSTER: In Hartford?

DAWSON: Yes. What did you say? Hatboro?

SHUSTER: In Hartford?

DAWSON: No, Hatboro I think. In Pennsylvania.

SHUSTER: Yeah.

DAWSON: Hatboro, I think it is. Dr. Jack Murray, do you know that name?

SHUSTER: No.

DAWSON: Well he's a...but however... he's the man that directed me to Bible School, and I went to Bible School that night and boy, I knew that this was what I had wanted all my life. Whatever I'm in, I want to know the basic fundamental doctrine teaching. I don't want to be thinking that I'm going to heaven. I'm sure of heaven. You get what I mean?

SHUSTER: Mhmm.

DAWSON: And I know God can't kick me out of heaven because it's sealed with His own precious blood. And he said, *When I see the blood, I will pass over you.* [Exodus 12:13] When I went into Bible School that night, eager and desirous of getting a knowledge of the word of God, and a fellow gave me a Scofield Bible, one of the teachers. And he said, "Son, you know, the body of Christ is...the black wood and the red wood." And he brought in these different races in

Solomon's temple, you know that made up the temple. In other words he was just telling me that we're just one. That God is no respecter of person.

SHUSTER: This was a white man?

DAWSON: He was a white teach...yeah. Teachers, all of our teachers were white in Bible School. But he encouraged my heart. And in other words, I was warmly greeted there. I wasn't...maybe I was the first black guy to attend Bible School in the city of Camden. You know this particular school...my wife, when I went home I told her, "Honey, well one thing you have to do, you have to go to Bible School." I put my foot down [laughs]. We both went together and we both graduated and so on. Then I guess I haven't thought of that school for about close to thirty years.

SHUSTER: Back up for a second...

DAWSON: Yeah, go ahead.

SHUSTER: And you said you were active in athletics. How...how did that get started? How did that get there?

DAWSON: When I was about nine or ten. Like I said, I worked...I had such a full background, no one would ever believe. When I tell kids that are coming along all the things that I used to do, just not to be bragging, just as a part of my life. Part of the warp and woof of my life. And they said, "Mr. Dawson, how old are you?" Listen when I was about twenty-four. "You must be about seventy five!" And this was over fifty years ago [laughs]. When we first started teaching at Sunday school, fifty kids down in south Philadelphia. I got it, and I shared it. From Bible School, to teaching Sunday school down at Gordon Reed in South Philadelphia. Cause see whatever you are you...if it's...if it's love then people need love, what are we supposed to do? Share it. Now whether they like it or not we still share it. Whether they love the Lord or not we still share it. You know? Whether they like me as a person or not, that has nothing to do with it. I've got a message. And I intend to give it as long as I live either by lip, or by life, or both. Doesn't matter.

SHUSTER: What kind of sports were you active in?

DAWSON: Well, I don't think you could hardly name anything other than tennis that I didn't participate in. There's baseball, basketball, football, soccer, track, wrestling, boxing, ice skating, roller skating...you just name it. Even thrown in a few snowballs in those days. That's the boy in me, okay? [Laughs].

SHUSTER: Did you do any professional or semi-pro?

DAWSON: Yeah, I did a little professional boxing. And I had an opportunity to go into black baseball and that was about the time I got married.

SHUSTER: When was that?



DAWSON: 1940. And there was no money there. Many times the managers would abscond with the money maybe eight or ten dollars, and the guy goes off with it. So I just played local baseball, local football, and basketball. And in high school we had soccer and track teams. And especially in junior high school they had tumbling. I was always into sports and anything that was body-building. And I just always wanted to be mentally alert, physically strong, able to...and I was coordinated enough to do almost anything that I had to do. Not...not being boastful, I was never an arrogant fellow. I don't think I've ever cursed anyone in my life, I say that before the Lord, to my knowledge. Didn't have to. Treat people right, and if they didn't treat me right I just tell them, and if I didn't tell them, I just backed off, that's all.

SHUSTER: What...what were some of involvement you mentioned you played some baseball?

DAWSON: What did you say?

SHUSTER: You mentioned you played some baseball. What were some of the teams you were on?

DAWSON: Well, the group... I began with an integrated group when I was about ten years of age. It was Wayne Athletic Club. And that group was disbanded during the [pauses] end of the war, around 1945. And I played from the time I was nine or ten until I started courting my wife around twenty-one I was with that group. And then I managed my own baseball time, organized a black team. I was the only black on the...on the...in this Wayne there was fifty boys.

SHUSTER: In the Wayne club?

DAWSON: In the Wayne club. That was my first start in sports, you know. And that was were I found out that I could do these different things enough to make the team. Whether it be baseball, whether it be basketball, or whether it be football. You know, I could...I could make the team. And just recently last Sunday, a week ago from yesterday, one of those folks who was married fifty years just invited us to their fiftieth anniversary. And again we were the only black ones there, my wife and I, you know. And that at which you know this is by... that wasn't our choice, that's the way it was set. Your father...my dad said, "Boy, you'll be able to get along with folk." And I've been able to do it. But daddy told me first. I can always go back, you know so you...you, well he didn't say, "a good mixer," but he said you can get along with folk. He could...my father could see things...I wouldn't say prophetic but you know he checked that boy out and said (what do we say) it was true to form. Like when it comes now to the work of the Lord. (I want to go back again, this is part of our personal testimony.) When I believed that God was calling us into the gospel ministry, I told my mother. It was a Saturday night, and she was ready for bed upstairs. They...I don't think my mother ever had electricity...near the end. We always had lamp lights and what not. Not that that's important, but I'm just stating that as a fact. And I told her, I said, "Mom, I believe God's calling me into ministry. And I want you to pray for me." And she said something I'll never forget as long as I live in ministry, that which I needed to feel it. She said, "Son, when you were a little boy, an infant, about a year old, the only time your grandfather ever saw you he said, 'Betty, this boy's marked for the ministry.'" I just told her about the call, we prayed. Never before had she ever mentioned anything about her son being a preacher. But when I needed it, when I needed that



confirmation, I got it again at home. "Your...your grandfather said, 'Betty, this boy's marked for the ministry.'" And then after I got into it, I knew it. [laughs] You know what I mean, I just committed myself to the Lord as I had to sports, or work, or whatever did. I just...I like to commit myself. I'd like to see committed Christians, dedicated. And this is what we encourage in our people. We don't have a lot of folk coming out to the church but we tell them that you need to commit your life to the Lord if you love Him. Live for Him, serving Him, teach your children to fear the Lord. And I said if Christian families train their children to fear the Lord then we're going to have strong, black Christian leaders and strong, black Christian churches. It won't come any other way. The Lord taught his disciples for two years before he sent them out. And they have a lot of problems but He loved them. Peter, James, and all of them...the problems were there but he loved them.

SHUSTER: How...how did you meet your wife?

DAWSON: I met her at a little place in Moorestown. These girls were at a...now this was a dance.

SHUSTER: Which was around when?

DAWSON: When she was...the year she graduated from high school.

SHUSTER: Which was....?

DAWSON: Around 1937. Just a group of kids out of high school course they didn't know anything about partying, you know. But this group of them got together and they had a party and some of them were dancing and what not. And I never dance. Football, mine was sports, not girls. And I wouldn't have met my wife. Now here it is again. I never went around with the girls. And a cousin of mine said, "Charles," (Cousin Charles, she always called me) "I have a girl. She's the finest girl that I think I've ever met. I'd like for you to meet her." And I thought about it, and one day I went up there to meet this girl. But she was with these girls, high school kids, that graduated from high school and they didn't know what a prom was. Because this is going back, I mean... they just celebrated their fiftieth anniversary I think in October. Yeah, October.

SHUSTER: She graduated in thirty-eight?

DAWSON: Thirty-seven. Last year, you know. And she introduced me to Effie. And before I saw Effie, I knew that that was my girl. I didn't know who she was but it clicked. I just...I just looked at her. She didn't know me, I didn't know her. And then my cousin introduced me to her, we spoke, and we sat down and talked for a while. Then at the time that things broke up, I asked if I could walk her to where she was staying with another girl friend in Moorestown. And she said, "No!" Hard to get, okay. [Laughs] So I said, "How about you give me your address, and I can write to you sometime if you don't mind." And she said, "Okay." She gave me her address. So most of our correspondence was done, you know our courting and all was done by correspondence. I'd write to her...she lived outside of a place called Moorestown. And then we courted one another I guess about three years. And I asked her father and mother for her hand in marriage. Her father never did consent. Not that he didn't want me as a son-in-law, but he was always a very sickly person. He



thought he was losing a daughter. I said, "No, you have a daughter but you're going to gain a son." At least a son, you know. And so we were married. We never had any problems like I said with in-laws or with my wife either. We just tried to get along in the light of Ephesians chapter 5. Everything we do, we try to base it on our knowledge of what the word of God teaches us. If it's a domestic problem, if it's a church problem, something on the job, whatever it is. From our knowledge...in other words, as I study the word of God and read it and seek to memorize portions of it, I want to put into practice what God says. Cause I fear him.

SHUSTER: And when were you married?

DAWSON: 1940.

SHUSTER: 1940.

DAWSON: Yeah.

SHUSTER: How long did you go to the Bible School?

DAWSON: It was a three year course patterned after the Moody Bible Institute. Just basic Bible doctrine. Yeah.

SHUSTER: What were some of the things that you studied?

DAWSON: Well, we had...we studied various books of the Bible, evang...personal evangelism, different ways of studying the Bible. Bible synthesis, Bible analysis- it was all Bible. It's like coming back to me short right now [laughs]. But we just studied the basic Bible doctrines of the word of God. And because then during the interim we began working at the ship yard. And again, I was preaching down there every day. Or whenever, if it wasn't every day, whenever. And again we had an integrated group there. And that's the way it is, because the body of Christ is integrated. Whether they're Southern go for it or they're not. Or they could be like the Jews that got on Peter for witnessing to Cornelius. God said he has no respect of person...that's why I love the Word. When you go back, God always has the final word. I care not how man, how big he might be it's what God said that really counts.

SHUSTER: When you were....

DAWSON: Good. There was another fellow in our neighborhood, Mr. Fields. Always quoted the Scriptures, always quoted the Book, always. One black man I knew always quoted the Book, said, "Bible, this Bible, His Bible!" That's what I always liked to hear. This was before I got saved when I was maybe around sixteen to about nineteen or twenty. Always Bible.

SHUSTER: He was an influence on you.

DAWSON: Oh, tremendous. I have some of these names down here. Folks that have had a tremendous influence on my life as an individual, they cared for me. They saw that I was

endeavoring to do the right thing, practice it daily. It wasn't lip service, it was a lifestyle. That's why I say Christ is the warp and woof of my life.

SHUSTER: Looking back on your training at the Bible School and from your years of ministry, where there some things you think would have been helpful to you that you didn't get?

DAWSON: Yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. You know, I've always wanted, when it came to really preaching and teaching, I've always wanted someone to disciple me. Get what I mean? Like when I went in the gym they showed my how to throw a jab, or hook, or shoeshine, or right cross, or upper cut, the pare...all this sort of thing. I got the basic things that I need to know to protect myself in the ring. And I was hoping too in the Christian walk there would be some...somebody that was Bible-oriented, maybe a pastor or teacher. Not necessarily a seminarian, but someone who knew the word and how to teach and study the word of God. Of course when you take Bible doctrine, that's not so much in the line of homiletics and hermeneutics and that sort of thing. And I often wanted that sort of thing. Someone that could be like a one-on-one.

SHUSTER: On how to preach and teach?

DAWSON: On how to preach and how to teach, spending time. I gradually came into things on my own just by studying and getting good books.

SHUSTER: *The Preacher and His Preaching* by Alfred B. Gibbs.

DAWSON: Yeah, Christian things...some of the great men that we know of, past and present, I get their books and we read what they...how they do that sort of thing. But I like to ask people questions that could be of help to me and I thought if we had a one-on-one. Like I taught kids how to play baseball from my background, taught them how to play basketball from my background, taught them how to play football from my background, you get what I mean? [Shuster assents]. And taught them how to manage money. Just a small, small background- I wanted to help them. And so on. And I just had hoped, because I thought this was I would even be a great asset, not only to my own family and my circle of friends but to all those that we come in contact with. See if a guy hones me up pretty good and the blade is sharpened, you can cut more wood with a sharp axe than the guy can with more strength than you have and a dull axe. Here's something my father used to tell me...it's not how big the guy is, but the amount of fight he has in him. [Both laughs] What he knows, you know? Yeah. So that was one of the things that is always...but I've thought about it many times now. But on the other hand, it has taught me to trust the Lord.

SHUSTER: How do you mean?

DAWSON: If I wanted to learn how to preach, I said, "Now Lord, since I haven't had people to teach me, you know, how to preach" and ask Him to open up His word to me. Then I take a pencil and put these things down. And things begin to fall in place, you see the outline standing out there. Different things that would stand out. But I said would to God that someone had, I know a couple of folk were interested in me. But not that much.



SHUSTER: You mean some teachers?

DAWSON: Teachers, yeah. A teacher at the Bible School, the fellows that stood behind us had an independent council that examined and ordained me as a preacher from the school. Because they saw what, you know, when we come from the shipyard and at night they give us a chance to say so. I would share some of things the Lord was doing down in the yard. And they were the ones that said, "Charlie, we believe that God has given you the gift of an evangelist. You ought to pray about it." And it shook me up at first. This was before I felt called to the ministry. That was in 1944.

SHUSTER: Was 1944 when you were called in?

DAWSON: I was called into the ministry and ordained into the ministry. You know, examined and then ordination followed. 1944, July the eleventh I think it was. But I just had...I just didn't have anyone to just (I lost my point there or not) to...to...to instruct me, and teach me, and give me what I call in quote "how to." How to prepare, how to study, how to know that you're really getting through to God. But I still learn how to get through to God every day. Sometimes I say, "Lord, it's Charlie." Nothing fancy. Sometimes I don't even open my mouth, I just kneel there and God works. And I know my life has been blessed of God no one knows. My wife knows and I know, and folks that know me know. We've had the privilege of witnessing to millionaires and judges and things and they hear it. And they show kindness down through the years. We have a guy who's a multi-millionaire, if he's in town he'll sit and have the same cup of coffee right there. Called me a couple of weeks ago, he calls me periodically, and he said, "God used you to indoctrinate me, to disciple me. When I first met you," he said, "I was just saved maybe six months." I didn't know it. I was just witnessing, like I'm talking to you. Whatever happens, God is doing this not me, you know? I'm not doing anything, I'm just telling folks what's the Lord's done on my heart and in my life. Shipyard, the same way.

SHUSTER: How did you begin your teaching at the shipyard?

DAWSON: Well, I was reading the Bible. And focus....

SHUSTER: During the lunch hour?

DAWSON: Yeah. Said, "Why don't you share it with us?" So I didn't always take the initiative. Like with my wife, I didn't take the initiative- she was brought to me. [Laughs] you know what I mean? And some folks that asked me said, "Why don't you share this with us?" So I had begin with what I had, just sharing it. And there was a larger group that has been doing evangelism in the work at the lunch hour. And they had heard of what was going on. By this time we had about fifty. We had two or three, and then a group of about fifty.

SHUSTER: Well where'd this larger group start?

DAWSON: Hmm?

SHUSTER: What was this larger group, was it from the church?

DAWSON: No, just in the shipyard. Just a group of men, you know, like you have all churches...many churches in South Jersey, they're from Wildwood, Cate, May, Camden, Gloucester, Moorestown, north and south of the shipyard with maybe a radius of forty to fifty miles. Trenton, New Brunswick... and those folk would be working at the shipyard. Especially during the war years, and the pre-war years, and the post-war years, you know? And they would...they...some of them were evangelically minded, and they started the meetings there. Well, they heard about this (I didn't know this when I went to the shipyard) but after the group had watched me every day just sit down and eat my lunch and read the scriptures. Study, I'm in Bible School, okay? And they would ask me to share some things with them, and that's how it started. And they would bring others, and they started getting saved!

SHUSTER: Well what...do you recall some of the texts you'd speak from or what they were?

DAWSON: Well, I know one. I think its Isaiah chapter one verse eighteen: *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* But we just went through different portions of gospel messages like John 3:14 to about 18: *If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto me. And that God sent not His son in the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.* And we'd just take Gospel text, study it, check it out, pray over it, and ask the Lord to use it, you know. And a lot of times my preaching has been extemporaneous. I don't always have to have notes before me. If its on the inside, as the Lord releases it, it goes out. But we did. I've always studied the word, I just... every day I just spend time with the Lord on my knees and in the word asking God to help me. He knows my burdens, He knows my concerns, He knows my love- first for Him, then for the Word, for the work that He's called me to. And then I think He's given me a vision of the lost not just here, but to the ends of the earth. And that's what we're concerned about. And that was what...this was what AIM [Africa Inland Mission] did when they invited me. [Pauses] Sid Langford.

SHUSTER: That was in 1968.

DAWSON: 1968. I wonder how they got my name. Well, he had taught me for a while as a missionary in Bible School....

SHUSTER: Sid Langford had?

DAWSON: Yes. He had taught missions in....

SHUSTER: Who then became home director of Africa Inland Mission?

DAWSON: Yes. He was in Tanzania at that time, but he was home on furlough. And he remembered me and I remembered him. But I never thought our paths would cross. And one day I received a long distance call from Brooklyn, New York [unclear].

SHUSTER: Where AIM's headquarters were.



DAWSON: Yeah, yeah. Now they're in Pearl River. [New York] And he told me they had a campaign in East Africa, a number of states, and so on.... And I asked him, I was inquisitive. I said, "How come you called me?" You know, because Tom Skinner was due to go originally. And he said, "Why, we had an evangelist that was due to go, and at the last minute he backed out," and he said, "I thought of you, and wondered would you think about it and pray over it." I said, "Well, how much time do we have?" So he said, "Eight hours, about two thirty to three o'clock in the day then." And I said, "Wow!" I'd put an exclamation mark by that. So how was...my wife was out. She came and another lady, I told her that we'd been asked by Sid Langford to consider going to Africa. And I wanted to know whether I had her permission... I asked my wife for her permission to go to Africa on this safari for seven weeks. And she said, "Yes, you have my permission." So we had prayer together, and we thanked the Lord for the opportunity. Well I'm a pastor at the time. I had been pastoring at that point for about eight years, starting in sixty.

SHUSTER: Pastor at what church?

DAWSON: The Broadway Bible Tabernacle.

SHUSTER: In...?

DAWSON: Camden, yeah. At...we had the same...the nucleus was the same as where we are now, but that got started through a Bible class, again teaching. And that's what folks need, teaching. More teaching than preaching. Then I called the church officers when they got in and told them about the opportunity that we had of doing some evangelization work in East Africa, and asked if we could have permission from them to go. And so they consented. Well, it was on a Tuesday night, and that's the night of teaching Bible School. So I went to Bible School, and told the Dean of the school the opportunity that we had, and wanted to know whether we could have permission from the school to participate in these meetings in East Africa. And so they agreed. To me, that was the mind of the Lord. First my wife, then the board, then the school agreed. And from that point on, Sid Langford called me on a Tuesday and two weeks later I was in Nairobi, East Africa. Sid said this...he said, "Charlie, if we had called any other black man in America, I don't think he would have met the qualifications you did."

SHUSTER: How did he mean that?

DAWSON: Well, he said...we had to get a passport, right? Takes about at least a week for that. Inoculations. And I'd been to Africa the year before. Just to qualify what we said earlier. I was there for about three weeks with the Afro-American Missionary Crusade, which we'll talk about later. And he said, "I don't believe we could have gotten with your qualifications just as we have." He said, "We believe this is of the Lord." And we thank God for that. Within two weeks' time, since we had the shots, which are good for about three years: malaria, typhoid fever, or whatever, you know. And then we had the passport. And all they had to procure then for me then was a visa to these four countries. And so we just knew that was the leading of the Lord. And the meetings were well-received, and as we said to you earlier during the day we were invited back personally by the

African churches that remembered us from '68. Seventeen years later they called and I couldn't believe it. I wrote a letter.

SHUSTER: Must have made an impression.

DAWSON: It was the Lord, not me. The Lord. You get what I mean, you know? If it's of the Lord, the Lord's going to work it. And if it isn't, it's regrettable [laughs]. Yeah.

SHUSTER: Back up for a second...when did you graduate from the Bible college?

DAWSON: 1945. From forty it was a three-year course.

SHUSTER: And during the war had you been drafted or were you working in the shipyard?

DAWSON: I worked in the shipyard, I was never drafted.

SHUSTER: Because you were doing war work in the shipyard.

DAWSON: Yeah. But I never avoided it. Whatever comes my way, I take it, no matter what it is.

SHUSTER: The shipyard was in Philadelphia or...?

DAWSON: Camden.

SHUSTER: Camden. How did you come to work there?

DAWSON: I was working at one shipyard, and again I didn't go there looking for a job, they called me. A guy called me said, "You want a job in the shipyard, I'll get it for you." I was already gainfully employed. That was on a...on a Saturday. And...but he said, "You have to be there seven o'clock Monday." I just had a chance to tell the other company right then and there that I wouldn't be working there anymore because this was a better-paying job and I'd been married about three months. This is my...in the 1940s, I started there the last day of forty, December thirty-first. And then after that all those things would be started, I started in on the railroad working as a laborer, and then later on we had the opportunity to go to school for ship fitting and blueprint reading and template making and that sort of thing. And that's where God really used us, that's where our ministry really began on the boat. There was fifty men...no, the complement of a hundred men that made up the lot of fitters. They needed that many fitters on the big boats. If the boat was larger like a battleship, maybe that would be double or triple. But like a (what do they call these smaller boats) light cruisers and that sort of thing. A flat top, an airplane carrier would take more men. Or they had a floating machine shop and all that sort of thing...and it would be much larger and take more of men. But if there was a hundred men on any boat that I worked on, one hundred men got a gospel tract. And all the bosses, there was fifteen, twenty, thirty leaders. They all got a tract. I just wanted them to know just where I stood. In other words, I declared my colors. They could see my color, but I'm declaring my colors for the Lord's sake, you know? [Laughs]. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then the Lord blessed that ministry. God had enabled me to excel as a fitter with the blueprints,

template making, and then getting along with folk, and I always preach the gospel. Christ was always first, always.

SHUSTER: You mention going to school to be a shipfitter, was that something the shipyard made available to you?

DAWSON: No, they sent me to the vocational school to learn blueprint reading and then how to make templates to...like if they wanted me to put this room up, no problem. I'd get the...like the templates...I could make a dress or pattern and.... When we say, learn how to make templates or patterns for ship fitting, whatever this takes to make this room. I could take the templates make it up the weighted of the steel and what not, and then they just send it to the shop and they would cut that metal, and sometimes it would become...it would come out prefabricated. And we would mount it as a unit and so on.

SHUSTER: What...what vocational school did they send you to?

DAWSON: It was the Pennsauken [pauses] Pennsauken...it's right outside of Merchantville. I don't know whether they call it the Camden County Vocational School but its in Pennsauken. Which is a part of greater Camden, you know, so Camden County Vocational School, I think that would be adequate. That was at night that I went there. And then, then they would have me teach blueprint reading on the job to other boys. The locations of the boat, whether you're at port, starboard, whether you're midship, in the bow, or stern, or down in the tanks anywhere. I don't think there was a part on that...I don't think there was a part on the boat that I worked on that I didn't cover. Down there...up in the crow's nest, that was the highest point, down in the chain locker where the chains go, you know. We worked all over. Then when it came time to...and I'm just saying this because it just helps, I believe, because...when the boat was launched then they would give me prints to maybe work in the bow of the boat or midship or aft end of the boat to see whether any parts were missing or not. And if parts were missing I'd have an big old sheet that I'd...and I'd just take it back to the office at the end of the day and then they'd get it fitted to go back there and take care of that. But my job was to go in all of these areas, whether it's the bow of the boat, whether it's the midship or middle of the boat, or the aft end of the boat or whatever part I worked at, I would do that.

SHUSTER: After 1945, then when you graduated from Bible College and you were ordained at the same time by the college?

DAWSON: Yeah. 1944.

SHUSTER: 1945.

DAWSON: I...I finished the school in 1945, when I graduated...I was ordained in '44. The school, because of the ministry in the shipyard, they could see what was happening. They could get the result. In the meanwhile, churches from all over south Jersey area...I was getting calls to preach all over the place, you know? The Lord opened doors. Cape May, Wildwood, Vinelands, Bridgeston I can't name all the places, but I'm just giving you a little backdrop.

SHUSTER: Would you...were you doing any prison ministry?

DAWSON: Oh yes, yes.

SHUSTER: How did you begin that?

DAWSON: Again, I was asked. A white fellow at the Camden Rescue Mission he said, "Brother...

SHUSTER: What was his name?

DAWSON: Yeah. Russell Harrison Jr. He said, "Brother Dawson, I'd like for you to go up to Camden Rescue...the Camden County Jail and speak." And I said, "Alright." And so we went there and spoke. And I think one or two meetings after that he dropped out and I was in charge. And so...1968.

SHUSTER: Was it every Sunday or every....?

DAWSON: No. It was every...every... I think it was every Thursday afternoon that they'd let you come in and give a gospel message. And then at the same time I was going to the rescue missions, like the Sunday Breakfast Association, have you heard of that? That's along Vine Street in Philadelphia...John 5:24...Wayside. But we zeroed in on the Sunday breakfasts, we've been there from 1942 until now. We still speak there. And that's about forty-six years again, from forty-two up to eighty-eight.

SHUSTER: What was it like at the...with the jail ministry who were in the Camden Jail? Who usually came to the?

DAWSON: The in...all the inmates. Sometimes we may have fifty....

SHUSTER: Did they...were they required to come?

DAWSON: No it was optional, you know. And a lot of fellows, they at that time...it's a different...people had their different ideology of concept now than they had in that day. If a man was in jail, maybe beating his wife, or drunk, or gambling, or maybe stealing something. It was not a major felony of any sort, you know. And we would invite them to come. And then when they'd heard...when they would hear the singing, and then the testimonies, many times we'd have maybe have fifty, sixty fellows out to listen to the service. We'd give an invitation. We wouldn't have much opportunity to do a lot of follow-up work, because they'd give you one hour, one hour. So maybe the message was about fifteen, twenty minutes, and maybe the singing was maybe the same length of time, and then dealing with the men. So we'd have one hour to get in and out. But we did that I guess from 19.... [pauses] I don't know whether I can recall exactly, but we followed that up. And then we did it on the state level at the state prison, Trenton.

SHUSTER: What was it like at the state prison?

DAWSON: Pretty rough. [Laughs] But some of the nicest groups that we had now asked us to speak to an assembly of men there, about three hundred of them. I don't think I've ever had an ovation anywhere like that I...

SHUSTER: Had a....?

DAWSON: They were challenged, you know, they were challenged. Say this again?

SHUSTER: You...you say you don't think you had an ovation anywhere like that. What do you mean?

DAWSON: You know, they were just.... You know when you're incarcerated and you think nobody loves you. And I brought a bunch of black guys up there with me, and some of them were singing and gave words of testimony. And it was something I don't think they had ever been exposed to before in a place like that. Because they would have whites go there and I know whites had gone there, but very few black preachers that frequented the jails on a regular basis. A lot of our preachers would say, "They get in jails and they don't bother." I don't know whether you wanted to, you know.... But that...that's it. They were not

SHUSTER: You mean...?

DAWSON: ...they were not...listen they didn't...somewhere along the line if you're ignorant of what the Scripture teaches in its totality. Wherever the men are, God wants you to reach them. At least try. Where the fish are running, what do you do? You fish, right? Well we're not fishing for fish, we're fishing for the souls of men! That's it in a nutshell. Now I don't care where you are. We've been in some places...I've been in places where I've been...not exactly fighting, but apprehensive [laughs]. With bad guys with knives and gloves, and we still give them the Gospel, right? Sometimes the head man would say, "You shut up and listen to this man tell you about Jesus!" "Go head preacher!" You get what I mean? Yeah that's....

SHUSTER: Now this is in the prison or in the....?

DAWSON: No, this is prison ministry as well as on the streets, street work. And in the homes. We've gone to homes where there's bootleggers and gamblers. We go there. They invited us in, the guy was sick, and he was the man that God used to get us started on street work, the way to evangelism. A drunkard. Who knew my wife when she was a little girl. He didn't know me when I knocked on his door. I just knocked on the door and the neighbors said, "What's up." We call it the red light district, you know....you follow me?

SHUSTER: Yeah. Yeah, prostitutes.

DAWSON: That's right.

SHUSTER: But they would have called in for somebody was sick there?

DAWSON: No. He was sick this one time when I went into the place and I didn't know whether...like I said, I was quite apprehensive, I was back in a corner. And all these bad guys were drinking and gambling. And the guy that was sick but he was sober. He was a tough guy, he was a leader. And boy, he cussed them good...cussed them good, you know, and said, "You listen to this man!" and then he said, "Go ahead, preacher, tell them about Jesus." And that's the way it worked out. And then we'd read the scriptures, had a word of prayer, and later on we had the privilege of leading that man to Christ. And when he died we had his funeral. The Lord...the Lord has done some wonderful things, you know, not hit or miss things but this is right on target. The Lord who is...coming from my lips as I recall it as accurately as I can give it to you that's the way as I give it to him.

SHUSTER: Now who was that?

DAWSON: The fellow name was Emerson Kitchen. We're in the kitchen now. His name was Emerson.

SHUSTER: When you were preaching in prison in Camden and Trenton, what about the jailer and the wardens? Were they friendly or hostile or indifferent?

DAWSON: No. Again, we usually found favor with people like that cause we always tell them, "Apart from the grace of God, you might be here too." No, there are no exemptions. We're not any better than they are.

SHUSTER: So when you went up to Trenton, it was pretty rough. What did you mean?

DAWSON: Well, these were hardened criminals. Murderers, rapists, you just name it they're hard.

SHUSTER: In Camden was just more petty crimes?

DAWSON: Just petty things. Maybe a man beat his wife up, knocked a guy out, maybe cut a guy. But...so when you go to what they call the "Big House," it's different then you have to have security, they take security measures to make certain you don't have a knife or gun but we are always armed with the word of God. The word of God. They know that. We've been there with Jersey Joe Walcott, he went with us down to Leesburg State Prison Farm. I've got a picture somewhere in the house. You want to see it sometime?

SHUSTER: Sure. I mean, not right now but....?

DAWSON: Yeah, I'll show it to you after. In fact, he's quite sick now. He's not too well, I tried to visit him last week. But he's not able...he's hardly.... I guess he's immobile. Still like to see him before I go away. But when you go to state prison...and yet those men have hearts. And by prayer and time and some love and fearlessness, I don't go in there scared. I know they're bad guys, but you don't have to be afraid. Because we go out on the streets, and there are bad guys out there too. Now one fellow will say, "Hey preacher!" Say, "Yeah?" He say, "I want you to know I'm scared."



"Don't tell anyone." [Laughs] You tell anyone they'd run you out of town, you know what I mean? No, you don't tell them that you're afraid. Just go ahead and give them the Gospel. 'Cause see some of these folks that have gotten saved through our ministry they were in the tap rooms, in the bars, running...well, you know what happens in the city outside of Christ. You're open and you're vulnerable. And when they go out and expose themselves [sic] for the first time, this is the first time out on the street maybe. And he sees all these guys he used to drink with, or maybe guys they used to run drugs with, you see this now. Well, we'll...every time we go out in the streets in the city, this is what we're confronted with. Sometimes I felt it wiser to leave my wife home. She's been with me everywhere, but when they were rioting in Camden, "Honey, you stay home." [Mutters under his breath, "I won't take her out there."] I don't want anything to happen to her. Happen to me it's no problem, but her let her stay here. But she'll go. She'll go witness to the kids. She specialized in dealing with children. If I'm witnessing to the hardcore, she stays with the kiddies, and young girls, and sometimes the mothers. She'd have a core group of women going out with them, fifteen...sometimes fifteen or twenty of them.

SHUSTER: Was this street preaching?

DAWSON: When I was street preaching they was group... you know what flannel graph lessons are?

SHUSTER: Ahaa.

DAWSON: That's what they would do. Get a group, bring some candy. We would always try to have some cookies. They come from poor families. It makes your heart break just to see them, you know, that nobody seems to care for them. But we want them to know that there's someone who really loves them, someone who's really turned on with them, and that's the Lord. And if we can get them to see that, they're on their way out of the darkness. They may have to live there for a while, but if you follow the Lord, you'll find that God will continue to direct you. I tell them I came from a rough neighborhood too. But God said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." [Matt. 5:16] We just give them the scriptures, because as we said earlier, whatever we give, it's based on the will of God. That's the way I live. I'll treat you right because I'm a Christian. Care not what the background is, whether Hispanic and we're beginning to reach Hispanics now. In fact I have an appointment to hear a Hispanic fellow's job this afternoon. Led him to Christ about two years ago. On drugs, running, gambling, fighting, always into something. But he heard about the love of Jesus. And his life has been revolutionized, who did it, the Lord. All I did was present the claims of Christ, and he believed it.

SHUSTER: Why don't we talk a little bit about how Afro-American Missionary Crusade got started.

DAWSON: Alright. I think it was around 1945, as close as I can recall, we...

SHUSTER: After you graduated from Bible college?

DAWSON: Around the same time. All these things kinda...just dated from that, you know, as the result of it. 'Cause we met a black...a group of Black Christians in Philadelphia that had the same doctrinal stand that we learned in Bible school. Fundamental, evangelical, missionary-minded, premillennial. Whether some folks like that or not, we believe the Lord may come right now. You may not get to Wheaton and I may not get to meet this Hispanic fellow today, but the Lord could come today. In other words, we believe in the end and the appearing of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. And so I went to Philadelphia, it was around 1945 to about '47 that I met a brother by the name of Montrose Waite. Did I show you the picture last time of these four men?

SHUSTER: No.

DAWSON: Well, Brother Waite was one of these four men.

SHUSTER: W-A-I-T?

DAWSON: W-A-I-T-E. And they went to about three or four African countries. One was Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the early twenties. 1923 to about '27 or '28. And he was the first black missionary man, the first black man that was a real live missionary that I saw.

SHUSTER: Who was he a missionary with?

DAWSON: With the Christian Missionary Alliance. And...there's something important about missions...with his burden for Africa, what a wonderful reception to have. How they call him "the Jesus man," and how someone had given him, I think it was about a hundred acres of ground, to get a work started. One of them called him a paramount chief. Have you ever heard that expression about the African leaders? And so when I looked at him, not too well dressed, didn't have anything, and my heart went out to him. Some of us got together to help him along those lines, but he had a burning message, had a real love, a real zeal. And then he said, "I want to go back to Africa." But in the meanwhile, the board that he had gone out with, they had put up a barrier. They weren't taking any more blacks.

SHUSTER: Why not?

DAWSON: Something come up, you know, they just.... Keep in mind this is around '45 to '47, if you will...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

DAWSON: ...at age slot...time slot. And we didn't have too many integrated churches. We don't have too many now.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

DAWSON: Although the church is integrated, has been since the days of the Ethiopian eunuch, if I remember my Bible correctly. So I don't have any problem with that. But however they...

SHUSTER: So they didn't want him to send him back because he was black?

DAWSON: That's right. That was it. There were others who wanted to go back, but they didn't. So this brother said it said it would be nice if we could get a board started. So he met with a group of us, and then we called in some white brethren that knew, you know, some white pastors in the Philadelphia area. Do you know the name Clarence Diddens?

SHUSTER: Clarence Diddens?

DAWSON: Diddens. He had the Limerick [Chapel]...do you know where Limerick might come in at Pennsylvania? He had a chapel out there. He had a Bible ministry for a number of years. Well however, he was one. And then there was a number of others. This other fellows name Clarence Diggins. I know he was one of the leaders in that group that stood with us. We had a number of white brethren to come in. So we got the word to organize and that...the board and everything set up, and these men stood with us until Brother Waite went on the field. And when we first started as a mission, ninety-five percent of the missionary's gift came in from white churches. And within about ten years, ninety-five percent of the income came in from black churches. In other words if people have a vision...there are a few black churches that know the Lord, that have been born again, that have a burden for Africa, a burden for souls. And this is what happens. And so Brother Waite went out, I think his wife, and six children. Just a step of faith. And they got the work started, and from that point up until now, we've had about eighteen or twenty missionaries that have gone. The number of couples was...Brother Quinby and his wife, Brother Waite and his wife and family, Brother Quinby his wife and three children. Brother Trustee and his family, Brother Shipley, Brother Thorpe, and these were all family men. And they're the men that have followed in the wake of Brother Waite. And they...we've had a number of women that have gone. We had one girl to lay down her life there on the field by all the reddish [?]...she's a Philadelphia girl....

SHUSTER: How did she die?

DAWSON: I think she finally died of pneumonia. She had...she had an illness, I don't think originally, but you know, if you have sickness or an operation and pneumonia sets in, usually it's fatal. I don't know why, but its just hard. But she...

SHUSTER: Was that....?

DAWSON: No that's alright. Hmm?

SHUSTER: Was that the name of the mission from the beginning, the Afro-American....?

DAWSON: The Afro-American, because we wanted that identity. And it's a faith operated work, and it has been, and hopefully it will always be. Just...just by faith, we don't beg, we don't solicit. We just tell of the need. And God has honored that through the years. And right now, things have been kind of rough. We're for looking to the Lord to raise up missionaries. We're really looking for black, trained...trained Christian missionaries, you know. I'd like to put...we need the training, we need that. That's basic. Not because we....



SHUSTER: What training do you mean?

DAWSON: Bible translation, Bible school. At least one year of Bible school. And a man that is sure where they're headed for before God takes the breath out of their nostrils now. Because if you're wishy washy, and the Bible says that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We want a man with his head (and sometimes it's the language we use on the street) screwed on right. You know your head is right on top of your shoulders. That's where it belongs. And so when we speak to people we want them to know that we're giving the truth as we see it. And we're sure it comes from the word of God. The Africans want the same thing. Right now we have...we don't have...we don't have a male on the field. But we have about eight Africans now that are evangelists from the work, since we last talked.

SHUSTER: Which the Crusade supports?

DAWSON: Hmmm?

SHUSTER: Does the Afro-American support....

DAWSON: Yeah, yeah, we send support, yeah.

SHUSTER: Are they all in Liberia?

DAWSON: Liberia, yes. And we know that this has only been going on for about two or three years and now it's come...the numbers multiplied. When we were there in 19...

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