CHAPTER FOUR
EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY 1892–1934

Before going any further with detailed analysis, it is time to pause and go back to the beginning to provide a summary of key events that defined the life of Herbert Armstrong, as well as important benchmarks in the history of the Worldwide Church of God in general. Many who witnessed those significant events in earlier decades are now gone, and newer ones just learning about that history may never yet have heard the story expounded in a succinct manner.

It can be overwhelming to take mountains of facts and figures and make cohesive sense of them all. Reading Mr. Armstrong’s autobiography will certainly tell the tale, but that requires digesting over one thousand pages of his writings. During the heyday of the church, members often heard stories repeated of how Herbert Armstrong first became interested in religion, how the Radio Church of God and Ambassador College were founded, and how that work grew over time. But as with all such history, it is easily forgotten, even by those who lived through part of it, let alone cloaked in obscurity for those to whom it is all so foreign. So what follows is a relatively condensed outline, taken primarily from the Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, of key events in the life and work of the man and his wife.

BEGINNINGS

Herbert Armstrong was born in 1892 in Des Moines, Iowa, to parents who were Quakers. He regularly attended church with his family and was indoctrinated into the most common Protestant beliefs about the nature of God, salvation, and Christian duty, but as a young adult he showed little personal interest in religion.
In 1910, at age 18, his Uncle Frank encouraged him to pursue a career in advertising, rather than go to university. He landed his first job writing want ads for the *Daily Caller* newspaper in Des Moines. Over the years, that advertising experience helped him change his objective from trying to use vocabulary *beyond everyone*, to learning to speak and write so that *all* could understand. He learned to eschew boring outlines and instead to make written concepts "pop" with interest. He applied himself with great ambition to becoming a successful businessman, educating himself, creating his own opportunities by *thinking big*, and working harder than anyone else. He sought to learn from those who had already achieved great success, and he possessed exceptional confidence in his own abilities to achieve anything he chose. More than that, this is how he described himself as a young man:

In those days I had developed a very excessive case of swelled-head. I was snappy, confident, conceited—yet *sincere*, and intending to be completely honest ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, November 1957, p. 4).

On July 31, 1917, Herbert married Loma Dillon, a schoolteacher his own age from a very small town in Iowa. In the 1967 revised autobiography, he elaborates that he was introduced to her as his third cousin, but also later states that Loma's father was first cousin to his own mother, which if so, actually made Herbert and Loma second cousins (Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, 1967, p. 186). He described Loma this way:

Also, from the instant when she first came *bounding* in at my aunt’s farm, I had noticed she was almost something of a tom-boy—active, very alert. Whatever she did, she did it quickly. I learned later that her brothers dubbed her with two nick-names—"She-bang" and "Cyclone!" She was full of fun, yet serious—with the unspoiled wholesomeness of an

They married in Chicago, where he was living and working at the time, but expecting that at any moment he would be drafted into the Army (the United States had just declared war on Germany on April 6). Although willing and eager to serve, he had been classified as "Class IV, Noncombatant," not only because he was newly married, but probably more so because they were already expecting a baby in May of the next year. Beverly Lucile was born May 9, 1918, and then Dorothy Jane on July 7, 1920.

Their two sons, Richard David and Garner Ted, were born sixteen months apart, in mid-1928 and early 1930 respectively. These two sons would later become pivotal in the work of their father, as this summary will show. Having been raised during the time of their parents' progressive conversion, that way of life would have a profound effect upon all of the children, although it is Garner Ted Armstrong who would become the key figure in the church storyline from the 1960s onward.

The flash economic depression of late 1920 destroyed Herbert's flourishing advertising business. He was still determined to rebuild it, but had not yet grasped that his future would lead in a totally different direction. Of that time period, he wrote:

For two years I stayed on in Chicago vainly attempting to revive a dead business. I didn't know, then, that God the Eternal was intervening to take from me and destroy my IDOL—the god I was placing before HIM! That false god was the vanity of desiring to be considered "IMPORTANT" and to reap and accumulate a big share of this world's material goods. . . .

From that time on I became like King Midas in reverse. Everything I touched, as a business enterprise, turned to failure, and always by causes totally outside my control! It

By June 1924, after some minor business successes but many more major setbacks, Herbert consented to Loma's request to make a trip to Salem, Oregon, to visit his parents and younger siblings whom he had not seen since their move out west twelve years previously. He was viewing this as a short-term excursion, fully intending to return to the Midwest by that same autumn, but she was convinced they would not be returning at all (The Plain Truth, January 1959, p. 30). After staying a few weeks with family in Salem, Herbert began exploring advertising openings in Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington. For months he was greatly encouraged, and the business opportunities continued to multiply. He was moving quickly to surpass even his greatest past accomplishments in Chicago, with expectations of even more incredible income within two or three years. And then, once again, by the fall of 1926, the bottom fell out. Here is how he described it:

Now, with a new business of much greater promise, all my clients were suddenly removed from possibility of access, thru powers and forces entirely outside of my control.

It seemed, indeed, as if some invisible and mysterious hand were causing the earth to simply swallow up whatever business I started. And indeed, that is precisely what was happening! God was knocking me down! But I was not yet out! . . .

My morale was fast descending to subbasement. I was not so cocky or self-confident now. I was being "softened" for the unconditional surrender to God ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, February 1959, p. 17).
Challenged About the Sabbath

During this very same time frame, Herbert Armstrong was already reeling at home because of his wife's new discovery from the Bible concerning the seventh-day Sabbath. This would prove to be the very beginning of a total life change for both of them.

Loma had met Emma Runcorn, who awakened in her an interest in meaty Bible study, rather than just the superficial, socially-focused religion of her Methodist upbringing. Mrs. Runcorn and her husband, O. J., were members of Church of God, Seventh Day, a "Saturday-keeping church," and through Mrs. Runcorn, Loma came to see from the Bible that there was no authority for worshiping God on Sunday. She could not wait to share her discovery with her husband who she was certain would respond with similar enthusiasm. Instead, this is how he reacted:

My wife gone into religious fanaticism! I was horrified, outraged! What would my friends—my business associates say? . . .

I had been humiliated, my ego punctured, by unpreventable business reverses. But this was the greatest humiliation of all. This seemed more than my vanity and conceit could take. It was a mortifying blow.

"You can't tell me that all these Churches have been wrong all these years and centuries! They all teach that SUNDAY is the day to keep and hold church services, all but one strange, queer, fanatical sect."

My wife was broken up, too, when for the first time in our married life I threatened divorce. She was sobbing.

"But I can't help it," she sobbed. "I have seen with my own eyes in the Bible that God made holy the hours between Friday sunset and Saturday sunset. I would be disobeying God if I gave it up now—I would be LOST!"

I was boiling with indignation and anger.
"I know that the Bible says we are to keep Sunday," I said sternly. "I don't know just where, but I do know that all these churches can't be wrong! I'm going to give you just one more chance, before your nonsensical fanaticism breaks up our home! I have an analytical mind. I've been trained in getting and analyzing facts! Now I'm going to research the Bible! I'm going to find where the Bible commands us to observe Sunday. I'll prove it to you in the Bible! Will you then give up this fanaticism?"

She agreed—IF I could prove it, and show it to her in the Bible. That was good enough for me! I was supremely confident. I knew it was there. I knew I could find it!

And so it came about that in the fall of 1926, with my business gone—with but one laundry client left, whose advertising required only some thirty minutes of my time a week, that I was goaded into my first real study of the Bible ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, March 1959, pp. 7–8).

Thus, what began as a strategy to defend his own personal pride and reputation in the world would boomerang into a series of events leading him in the opposite direction.

From his sister-in-law's goading during the same time, he also began a study of the theory of evolution, which prompted him to start at the very beginning to either prove or to refute the existence of God. After six months of intensive study, he found that evolutionary theory was a charade, supported only by circular reasoning which could never hold water. He also found no evidence whatsoever in the Bible for worshiping on Sunday. Much to the contrary, he discovered that the real crux of the issue was obedience to the commands of a Creator versus the incessant rejection of any authority except that originating from men's minds. Here is how he described the aftermath of his study:
It was humiliating to have to admit my wife had been right, and I had been wrong, in the most serious argument that ever came between us.

It was shocking, disillusioning, to learn, after intensive study of the Bible for the first time, that what I had been taught from a child in Sunday School was, in so many basic points, the very opposite of what the Bible plainly states! ...

They had originated, as research in history had revealed, in paganism. Numerous Bible prophecies foretold it. The amazing, unbelievable truth was, the source of these popular beliefs and practices of professing Christianity was, quite largely, paganism and human reasoning and custom, not the Bible!

I had first doubted, then searched for evidence, and found proof that God exists—that the Holy Bible is, literally, His divinely inspired revelation and instruction to mankind. I had learned that one's God is what a person obeys. The word "lord" means master—the one you obey! Most people, I had discovered, are obeying false gods, rebelling against the one true creator who is the supreme ruler of the universe.

The argument was over a point of obedience to God.

The opening of my eyes to the truth brought me to the crossroads of my life. To accept it meant to throw into my lot with a class of humble and unpretentious people I had always looked upon as inferior. It meant being cut off from the high and the mighty and the wealthy of this world, to which I had aspired. It meant the final crushing of vanity. It meant a total change of life! ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, April 1959, p. 6)

Finally making the choice to embrace that new path in 1927, Herbert Armstrong was baptized (in either May or June; Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, 1967, p. 311) and then sought to pursue something that had true meaning in his life.
There is something interesting that many others have failed to remember or to emphasize in reciting this history. Notice how Mr. Armstrong speaks of the role his wife continued to play in his spiritual growth:

From the time of my conversion Mrs. Armstrong has always studied with me. We didn’t realize it then, but God was calling us together. We were always a team, working together in unity ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, May 1959, p. 10).

This fact will become much more significant in later years as the story unfolds.

**WHERE IS THE CHURCH?**

It is all very good to acknowledge a Creator God and a need to obey Him, but where to go from there? The very same Bible that Herbert Armstrong came to accept as God’s Word also spoke of an assembly of true believers. Where was this "church"?

For some time, he fellowshipped with those families through whom he and Loma had first learned about the seventh-day Sabbath. These people were affiliated with an organization headquartered in Stanberry, Missouri, named Church of God, Seventh Day. But this group’s doctrines were not all satisfying to Herbert, which is why he states emphatically that he never became an official member:

Meanwhile, what was I to do? I was not at all convinced this was the one and only true Church. Yet, if it was not, *which one was?* This one came *closer* to the Bible qualifications than any I knew.

Therefore, I began to fellowship with their scattered and few members in Oregon, while at the same time refraining from acknowledging membership. . . .
And so it was, in this detached fellowship, that Mrs. Armstrong and I continued the first three and a half years of my ceaseless night and day study of the Bible—of history, especially as connected with Biblical history and prophecy—and of pertinent allied subjects ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, August 1959, p. 15).

It was this continued personal study—and then writing his findings in article form—that first catapulted Herbert into greater visibility within that little church, eventually leading to his role as a teacher among them. Ironically, it is also this very same tenacity to study and to "prove the truth" that would eventually annoy those church leaders enough to solicit his expulsion.

**Trying to Be a Big Shot?**

Once Herbert Armstrong began to focus upon religion, what was his new personal mission, really? Detractors will argue that he simply co-opted religion as a new outlet to make himself rich and famous. His own account is much different. He describes a sincere and heartfelt desire to get to know the true Creator God and to learn the real truth about man’s purpose for existence—to apply himself to something more rewarding than the vanity of the world. His voracious study and the writing of his findings were foremost instruments for his own learning, but would lead him nevertheless into the spotlight. He also states that his education took many years, one teaching at a time:

But, as mentioned before, all this study and research had to be approached a single doctrine at a time. I was to be some years in getting to the very trunk of the tree of the very purpose for which mankind was placed on earth, and getting clearly straightened out with a right understanding of God’s plan.
Nevertheless, having been a trained magazine article and advertising copy writer, the results of these studies were written up, purely for my own benefit, in article form. My wife began showing these articles to some women members of this Church of God who lived in Salem. Soon they began to urge me to preach before them. But becoming a preacher was the very last thing I had ever wanted to do. I felt an instinctive aversion to the idea.

Meanwhile, on their urging, a few of these articles had been mailed in to The Bible Advocate in Stanberry, Missouri. These articles began appearing on the front page (“The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong,” The Plain Truth, August 1959, pp. 15–16).

His first "sermon" in the summer of 1928 was a Sabbath lecture to a small group near Salem about a new "discovery" of truth concerning the Covenants. Although amateurish (according to Mrs. Armstrong’s critique), it was well received and he was asked to speak on a regular basis to this little group that was without a local minister. Opposition came from Stanberry as church leaders worried that Armstrong was trying to create his own following out of their members. But an attempt to silence him by ceasing to publish his articles met with a significant backlash from the local people. Even though the ministerial leadership acquiesced under this pressure, the spirit of jealousy, competition and distrust among those leaders would be enduring.

Induction into the Ministry

In November 1930, many members of the church in Oregon came together in the town of Jefferson to form the Oregon Conference of the Church of God, for the purpose of holding tithes in the local area, rather than sending them to the "General Conference" in Stanberry, Missouri. Although the Armstrongs were not official members, Mr. Armstrong was asked to be the secretary of the meetings leading to
this new organization. (It was this Oregon Conference that would ordain Herbert Armstrong as a minister the following year, not the Stanberry General Conference.)

After the Oregon Conference was formed, Herbert was asked by the new leadership to hold a public evangelistic campaign in December 1930. Designing a circular to advertise the meetings to be held in Harrisburg, Oregon, was the first time he began to use his twenty years of advertising experience in God’s Work (The Plain Truth, November 1959, pp. 8–9). The results of this campaign were meager, but four new individuals were converted. They wanted to be baptized. But Herbert was not yet an ordained minister. With approval of a young minister of the Church of God, sent out from Stanberry headquarters, Herbert Armstrong performed his first baptisms.

Here is how he describes the result:

This brought stern criticism from “authorities” higher up in the church. There was criticism because the Conference paid expenses when I was not even a member. In fact, from this time I was to meet continued criticism, opposition, persecution, and political maneuvering to discredit and remove me from the active ministry (“The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong,” The Plain Truth, November 1959, p. 31).

Every person has his idol. God cannot receive and convert a human life until his idol has been smashed or torn from him. My idol had been an egotistical sense of self-importance—a cocky self-assurance—a passion to become successful in the eyes of the material world. God is creating in those He calls a righteous character which can be developed only through experience; and experience requires time. God has a lot of time—He is Eternal—He has always existed—He always will.

It took time to eradicate from my heart the love of the praise of men. God gave me, instead, the false accusations,
the unwarranted oppositions, the scheming persecutions of people. It required time to bring me to a place where I no longer set my heart on material possessions and the finer things of this material world.

This process required not one or two years—not seven—but four sevens! For 28 financially lean and humiliating years out of the very prime of life, God continued to root out of my life and character this vain idolatry!

From the first and for many years I was the least of the ministers. I was the green-horn tail-ender among the ministers of the Church of God (world headquarters then Stanberry, Missouri). And I was never permitted to forget that fact! *God knew I needed this* ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, December 1959, p. 7).

It was Robert Taylor, a minister formerly of the Seventh Day Adventists from California, who began teaching the Oregon brethren in 1931 and who advocated ordaining Herbert officially into the ministry.

Mr. Taylor's suggestion meant a complete change in my life. In former years the idea of becoming a minister was the very last thing I should have wanted to do. But by June, 1931, I had been preaching a great deal for three and a half years. By this time my whole heart was in it. . . .

The decision was not difficult. God had now brought me to the place where I really "heard" the voice of Christ as if He were saying, "Come, and follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men" ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, December 1959, p. 9).

So, in an outdoor meeting in the rural area of Jefferson, Oregon, in June 1931, ministers and laity alike laid hands upon him:
I am sure it was the weight of the *experience*, from a spiritual and emotional standpoint, rather than the physical weight of hands and arms—but it seemed I was entirely weighted down with the heaviest load I had ever stood up under, as one of the ministers asked God in prayer to ordain me into the ministry of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

To me this was symbolic of the tremendous responsibility that now came down on my head and shoulders (*The Plain Truth*, December 1959, p. 9).

**The Question of Church Government**

In the process of learning more of the truth of the Bible, Herbert Armstrong was confronted with questions about proper organization of the church. Once ordained as a minister, he became immersed immediately in the reality of church government as practiced by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God. Here is how he described the question that confronted him in 1931 and would take nearly twenty years to be resolved:

I was especially puzzled over the matter of church organization. Not yet having come to see and understand the plain and clear Bible teaching, I had gone along with the Oregon Conference in its idea of government by the lay members. In the Conference the governing board was composed solely of lay members. They hired and fired the ministers. . . .

But the question of church organization and government was to keep coming up in my mind for years, before it was finally to become clear. Remember, I still was driven by the persistent question: "*WHERE* is the one *true* Church—the same one Jesus founded?" This Church of God, with national headquarters at Stanberry, Missouri, seemed to be closer to it, according to the pattern in the Bible, than any—yet I was unable to reconcile myself that such a small, and especially
such a fruitless church, could be that dynamic fruit-bearing spiritual organism in which, and through which CHRIST was working. Surely the instrument Christ was using would be more alive—more productive! Yet I had not found it! ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, January 1960, pp. 6–7).

So, for a number of years he tried his best to work within the structure that already existed among these Sabbath-keeping brethren. It is apparent that he never sought to make himself the center of attention. He seems sincerely to have desired to achieve "results" in helping the church to grow, and was very willing to "play second fiddle" behind other ministers in order to accomplish that overarching goal.

**Poor Results From Collaboration**

Both before and after his ordination, Herbert Armstrong worked in several instances with other ministers to organize evangelistic campaigns to spread the gospel. Here is what he said about the fruits of those projects:

My first evangelistic effort was conducted alone, at the end of 1930, in Harrisburg. There were conversions. In 1931 I was teamed with Elder Taylor, who had arrived from California. There were no results, except for the night it stormed the meeting out, and in a private Bible study in my room Mrs. Elmer Fisher had accepted the truth. I was teamed with Elder Roy Dailey. There were no results. He left Umapine. I continued alone, and there were conversions. Results then were small—indeed it was a small beginning, compared to the mounting world-wide harvest of today [1967]—but God was using me, and producing "fruit" ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, January 1960, p. 9).
This was the consistent pattern over those early years. Only when Mr. Armstrong "wound up" working alone did there seem to be any serious response. This seemingly accidental occurrence would become a consistent pattern, leading Herbert Armstrong eventually to conclude that God does indeed sponsor His divine work through particular chosen servants. It is one thing to claim such a role and then seek selfishly to substantiate it. It is quite another to have that role thrust upon one, becoming apparent through repeated events and proofs manifested through undeniable results.

**Derailed for a Time**

At the end of 1931, there was no salary available from the church to support Herbert and his family full time in the ministry. Although he regretted it later, he allowed himself to be enticed into accepting another newspaper advertising job in Astoria, Oregon. What he intended to be only a short-term position stretched into fifteen months, until the beginning of 1933. During that time he continued to study and learn, although there was no opportunity to focus upon God’s work. This is how he described that time:

I found I was caught in a trap. We had 23 men employed. If I left then, the paper would have folded up, and these men would have been out of work. There still was no money in the Oregon Conference church treasury to bring me back into the ministry. I was stuck in Astoria. God intended for me to learn a lesson. It seems that most of the time I have had to learn these lessons the **hard way**, through experience, and by suffering. This was to be no exception. It was not until the end of February, 1933, that my prayers to be relieved of these newspaper responsibilities, and to be allowed to return to God’s ministry, were answered ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, February 1960, p. 32).
SON MIRACULOUSLY HEALED

While Mr. Armstrong was working in Astoria, Mrs. Armstrong and the family were still living in Salem, and he was making trips back most weekends. Here is his account of a significant event in their lives which would also impact the future of the church:

Finally, by early July 1932, we decided to move the family to Astoria. This resulted from my wife calling long distance late one afternoon asking me to rush home. Little Garner Ted was stricken with pneumonia! I drove the Messenger coupe down to Salem, arriving late that night. The children were asleep. Mrs. Armstrong was still up, beside little Teddy’s sofa, on which he was lying. Immediately, we both knelt beside our sick baby. Little Garner Ted was then two years and five months.

And I must explain here that he had been, to that time, dumb—unable to talk. While somewhere between six months and a year old, he had fallen out of his crib-bed head-first onto the hard wood floor. We attributed his inability to talk to this fall, landing on his head. He would point to whatever he wanted to tell us about, making motions, and grunting "Ugh! Ugh!" But he was unable to speak a single word. We were becoming much concerned.

I anointed Teddy and began to claim God’s promises to rebuke the fever and heal him. As I was praying, Mrs. Armstrong silently prayed, asking God that, if it was His will to heal our baby of this dumbness at that time, to put it in my mind to ask for this, as well as healing from the pneumonia. . . .

I did also have this in mind—or God put it in my mind—for the very instant she had asked for this, I began asking God to restore Ted’s power of speech.

His fever left quickly. The very next day he was able to say a number of single words. In about three days he was

This account shows not only the miraculous way God was working to honor the faith and sincerity of the Armstrongs, but even more particularly, the quiet but strong role that Mrs. Loma Armstrong continued to play as events progressed. This, too, will continue to be evidenced over the next thirty-five years of their lives.

THE TITHING LESSON

In later decades, the issue of tithing would become very contentious, and the Worldwide Church of God would be criticized by the world for its teaching on the doctrine of tithing, among other things. But here is what Mr. Armstrong recounts about the very personal lesson he and Mrs. Armstrong learned from their own experience:

I have mentioned repeatedly how God had brought me down, reduced us to poverty and want, and how much we had suffered hunger through those years. Much of the time in Astoria, up until about the time of this emergency trip to the Helms farm, we had not had enough to eat.

I have explained in past chapters how, after conversion, I had to come to learn and understand one doctrine at a time. The truth was not acquired all at once. I had known that the Bible had quite a little to say about tithing one’s income, and probably I had by this time come to understand that it was still in force during the New Testament. Yet somehow it had never become completely clear, and we had never made tithing a regular and strict practice.

At about this time, in the little time I had from my work at the newspaper for Bible study and prayer, I had made a special and thorough study of this matter of tithing. We saw the mistake we had been making, and started a definite
practice of strict tithing. We had only a very little on hand, but we sent a tenth of it, plus an offering, to the Oregon Conference treasurer.

That very day, the way opened for us to be able to stock up at home with a reasonable abundance of food. For one thing, we had a large thick steak. My wife cooked it at low heat with the utensils we had acquired when I had devoted a year to selling them. I shall never forget that steak! It was 'way and by far the best steak I have ever tasted!

Although we still were required to live another 14 years in the barest and most modest financial circumstances, we have never from that day had to be actually hungry, and miss meals, because of financial poverty! We have since heard of scores and scores of case-histories of the experiences of others who were immediately prospered, once they began tithing. But we, ourselves, lived through this same experience. I am very grateful to have been privileged to have been instrumental in bringing countless others into this same divine blessing! My wife and I had to learn it the HARD way! ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, March 1960, p. 24)

It was February 1933 when the door opened for Mr. Armstrong to return his attention to the ministry. The Oregon Conference had accumulated enough funds to pay the Armstrongs $3 per week, and sent a member to Astoria to move them back to the Willamette Valley. Since the Astoria newspaper was already virtually defunct by then and the workers already gone, Mr. Armstrong felt comfortable in leaving and resuming his primary mission in the ministry.

Lesson of Faith and Divine Healing

Two months later, in April 1933, the next major lesson would begin. Mr. Armstrong's father had embraced the Truth by this time and asked to be baptized. Having experienced what was thought to
be a bad case of indigestion, he had asked to be anointed. It was planned to baptize him the day after this anointing. But by that evening, he had fallen into a coma and never recovered. It was not indigestion, but a heart attack. Mr. Armstrong had full confidence his father would be healed, yet at 9:40 A.M. the next morning he died. Here was the result as it affected his son:

I knew that God could not break a promise. I knew God has promised to heal—that Jesus took the penalty of physical sickness and infirmities and paid it for us by having His perfect physical body broken by being beaten with stripes!

But why, then, did my father die? Through James God instructs us that if any lack wisdom, he shall ask of God—asking in faith, not waverin or doubting—and God promises wisdom shall be given. I prayed earnestly. I asked God for understanding.

And I searched the Scriptures for the explanation. I did not doubt—but I did seek an explanation. Faith must be based on understanding, and I knew there was something I had not yet come to understand. Naturally I soon came, in this search, to the "faith chapter"—the 11th of Hebrews. Then the answer became plain.

God gives us many examples of faith in that wonderful chapter. I noticed the example of Abraham—the father of the faithful. He, with Isaac and Jacob and Sarah "all died, not having received the promises." My father, like them, died, not having received God's promise of healing—AS YET! Did the death of Abraham, before he received what God had unconditionally promised, nullify that promise? Did his death mean that God failed—that God's promise was worthless, not to be kept? not at all!

No, it simply meant that, for God's own reason and purpose, the fulfilling of the promise is delayed until the resurrection!
In like manner, I could now understand that God has promised to heal—but He has not promised how immediately, or by what manner, He will do it. I knew, now, that my father’s healing is still absolutely sure. He will be resurrected—healed! I saw, now, that our days are indeed numbered. God has not promised that we shall live in this mortal existence eternally. It is appointed to men once to die—and after this the resurrection. I read how the trial of our faith is allowed to work patience.

God, then, does give us tests of faith. Faith is the evidence of that not seen, not felt. Once we feel and see that we are healed, we no longer need the invisible spiritual evidence of faith. Faith, then, is our evidence—our proof of the healing—which God gives us to be exercised and utilized between the time we ask, and the time the physical evidence is granted.

We should not go to God, asking, unless we have faith that God will do what He has promised, and what we are ready to ask. Then, after we ask, we should still have faith—just as before—that God will do as He has promised.


This is a succinct summary of the original doctrine about divine healing that would be taught to thousands. It is another teaching that brought persecution upon the church in time, and was eventually altered by the Worldwide Church of God in the tumultuous decade of the 1970s. But this history confirms not only the original teaching that Herbert Armstrong came to understand, but also the divine means by which he claims God chose to teach it. This would be the very same pattern that would emerge to confirm many doctrines of the church over time. It is also the foundation of thinking that would be repudiated in his old age. This is why time has been taken to highlight these details.
HUMBLE BEGINNINGS OF THE RADIO CHURCH OF GOD

In the spring of 1933, Mr. Armstrong had once again collaborated with another minister (Elder S. A. Oberg) for an evangelistic campaign over several months in the Salem, Oregon, area. Pentecostal elements had, for the most part, hijacked those meetings and chased away anyone who was interested in simple, straightforward Bible instruction (Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, 1967, pp. 465–468). Because Mr. Armstrong was still being paid a small salary by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God, he felt obligated to defer to their authority in assigning his duties and to work with these other men, even though he was anxious to pursue other opportunities (p. 474). Mr. Armstrong describes one such opportunity which would mark the beginning of the Radio Church of God:

The meetings held by Elder S. A. Oberg and me in the "Hollywood" district of Salem, Oregon, ended on July 1st, 1933. Just prior to this date I received an invitation that was to result in the start of the great world-wide work of today.

This invitation came from Mr. and Mrs. Elmer E. Fisher. They were the couple who had been brought into the church by our private Bible study in my room, the night the storm prevented the meeting, during the tent campaign in Eugene, in the summer of 1931. The Fishers were successful farmers, living seven miles west of Eugene. Mr. Fisher was a member of the school board of the one-room Firbutte school, eight miles west of Eugene on the old Elmira road. The Fishers asked me to hold meetings in this country school house, inviting me to be their guest in their farm home during the meetings ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, May 1960, p. 11).

The Oregon Conference approved the plan for these meetings, and Mr. Armstrong began evening Bible studies almost nightly for
several weeks. There were twenty-seven attendees at the very first meeting, on Sunday, July 9, 1933. Through those initial meetings he was forced to prove himself against particular individuals who attended for the sole purpose of stirring up trouble, making visiting ministers look foolish. But Herbert Armstrong was different, and he successfully weathered these attacks, proving not only the strength of his doctrinal understanding compared to others, but also the ability to think on his feet and to "convince the gainsayers" in a public forum. The result was a nucleus of local attendees that became the foundation of the Radio Church of God.

CONTROVERSY OVER BAPTIZING PORK-EATERS

At the same time, Mr. Armstrong was still dealing with complications from his association with the Oregon Conference. Other men with personal agendas continued to accuse and to undermine him, keeping Mr. Armstrong in a defensive posture. The flashpoint centered around the requirements for baptism. Here is how Mr. Armstrong described it:

At this Meeting with Mr. Ray and Mr. Oberg, they strenuously objected to my baptizing new converts before I had preached to them against pork, and had evidence they had given it up. I knew that Messrs. Oberg and Ray intended to use this against me in the business meeting, as their latest trap to get me ousted from the payroll.

I must repeat that I was receiving a salary of $3 per week! The farmer members provided my family in Salem with a certain amount of food, in addition to the salary ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, June 1960, p. 10).

In what Mr. Armstrong called the "all-day wrangle," he was forced to defend the fact that he was not making the eating of pork a "test" for baptism. Here was his rationale at the time, which is very
revealing in comparison to the policy used decades later in the Worldwide Church of God:

Since people cannot fully comprehend the truth of the Commandments and the teaching of the Bible until after they receive the Holy Spirit, and since there is no promise God will give the Holy Spirit until after baptism, therefore I baptized them after repentance and faith, just as the Bible instructs—and then, after laying on hands with prayer for their receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12, 14–17; Acts 19:5–6; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6, etc.), I taught them God’s Commandments, and not to eat unclean meats, etc. Every convert I had ever baptized had obeyed all these truths as soon as I taught them. They were submissive, teachable, yielded to God, hungry for His truth. The knowledge of the Lord is something to teach converted people whose minds are opened by God’s Spirit. We must continually grow in this knowledge ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, June 1960, p. 13).

Ironically, over the next thirty years within the Radio Church of God, this philosophy morphed into something very similar to that of the old Oregon Conference, with ministers requiring potential members to state that they were not eating pork, not smoking, etc., before being baptized. By the 1970s, it became even more stringent, requiring demonstration of many "spiritual fruits" before even being invited to attend a Sabbath service, let alone becoming baptized! It is just one more way that the history of Mr. Armstrong’s thinking from the early years would be contrasted with that which emerged once that physical church grew in scope and power.

Mr. Armstrong’s refusal to depart from this philosophy about baptism in 1933 created a furor among the other Oregon Conference ministers, and they sought to force him to follow their policy. Mr. Armstrong refused to be manipulated. This is how he responded:
They immediately offered a resolution that I be required, if I remained in the conference, to baptize people their way instead of the Scriptural way, and those remaining inside the church building were swayed into voting for it. . . .

As soon as I heard of the action taken, I immediately wrote a letter cancelling the $3 per week salary, and suggesting they give it to Messrs. Oberg and Ray, or else go throw it in the Pacific Ocean! I did not resign from the Conference, nor was I put out. But I refused further salary.

My wife was in complete accord with me (Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, 1967, p. 492).

This event effectively set him free to begin devoting his attentions to the new little flock solidifying outside of Eugene, Oregon, which was growing slowly but surely and showing more serious appreciation for his approach to God’s Truth. It was still very meager, with only about twenty firm members after six weeks of Bible studies in the Firbutte schoolhouse. It required a true act of faith on the part of both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong to stick to their convictions without evidence of any significant physical support:

My wife and I knew we were obeying and serving God. We knew He was using us. The fruits being borne were loud testimony of this. Therefore we knew, in perfect faith, God would supply our need ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, June 1960, p. 14).

The Very First Radio Broadcast

The opportunity for Herbert Armstrong to take his religious message to a much broader audience appeared to happen quite by accident. It was never premeditated on his part to try to utilize anything but print media to advertize the gospel. But this is what occurred:
Late in September someone brought to my attention the fact that the local radio station at Eugene, KORE, then the very smallest minimum-power of 100 watts, had a Morning Devotional program scheduled, but that they were having difficulty getting local ministers to conduct the program. It was free time, carried by the station as a public service sustaining program, of 15 minutes, 7:45 to 8:00 A.M.

Immediately I went to the radio station. A woman secretary told me she felt sure they would be glad to have me take the program for a week. I was to call back later for the exact date.

On my second call I was assigned the week of October 9th.

October 9th was surely a great big day in my life—the day of my very first experience before a microphone, ON THE AIR! ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, June 1960, p. 14)

Even from his first awkward and novice presentation behind a microphone, that short radio program immediately began generating letters to the station. This prompted the station owner to propose a permanent, thirty-minute program on Sunday mornings, at a reduced cost of $2.50 per half-hour. Even though that was still a fortune to the Armstongs—given their severe financial challenges—in faith they accepted the proposal:

But, $2.50 every week! WOW! That was almost as much as my entire salary had been! And I had just previously renounced even that small salary! . . .

Yet I knew this was God's work, not mine. I was only an instrument. God had promised to supply every need.

God had OPENED THE DOOR OF MASS EVANGELISM!

He had opened the first radio door (Rev. 3:8). I knew He wanted us to walk through that door. I knew He would somehow supply that $2.50 every week. I knew also that we had to do our part, not lie down, do nothing, and expect God

At the very same time that this new radio experiment was percolating, something else very significant was occurring as well. Mr. Armstrong and his local core of supporters were finalizing plans to formalize their association into a registered church:

Then, October 21st, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Smith, just across the road from the Jeans school, 4 miles west of Firbutte, a new Church of God was organized, with Mr. E. E. Fisher as deacon, and myself as Pastor. Meetings continued from that date, three times a week, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and Sabbath afternoons. Attendance was averaging 22. A first action of the new Church was the decision of whether to go ahead with the broadcast. They all approved it joyfully as an effective evangelistic activity of the Church ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, June 1960, p. 32).

The fact that this new church organization was being formalized at the very same time that the radio program was being developed certainly influenced the selection of the group name. During the first two to three years, the format of the radio program was actually a fully-condensed church service, including music and an opening prayer. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that in the fall of 1933, the group would be named the Radio Church of God (Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, 1967, p. 508).

Birth of The Plain Truth Magazine

The new half-hour radio program on Sunday mornings was contracted to begin in the new calendar year, 1934. But in preparing for this debut, Mr. Armstrong felt compelled to address another
priority at the same time. The end goal was not just to "be on the radio." He truly saw this radio program as a tool to accomplish something more profound. To him, it was always about proclaiming the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and providing a means for the called of God to respond and to embrace that way of life. He believed it himself and sought to live it. He wanted others to have the knowledge that God had shown to him, and likewise to have the blessings of that true way and the hope of a glorious future.

Therefore, the approaching debut of the new radio program inspired him to develop another significant program to work in concert with it. That new program was The Plain Truth magazine. Here is how Mr. Armstrong spoke of its origin:

Not only did I set out with a will to produce the radio program, but I realized there must be follow-up if this new effort were to be resultful.

Immediately the idea came of realizing, at last, the dream I had cherished since 1927—the publication of a magazine, to be called The Plain Truth. Back in 1927 I had made up an entire "dummy" of this proposed magazine. I had even written articles for it. . . .

This ambition to publish The Plain Truth was the natural outgrowth of earlier business experience. Much of my 20 years of advertising experience had been spent in the class magazine field.

Now, at last, I realized that this magazine was a "must" as a follow-up for the radio broadcast. . . .

My idea for this magazine, from the start, had been to publish a magazine, not for church members, but for the general public—the unconverted and unchurched—an evangelistic-type publication to bring to the world God's TRUTH—making it plain! ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," The Plain Truth, August 1960, p. 11)
An additional part of his strategy for follow-up was to continue those personal, local evangelistic meetings, to reinforce the teachings that would be proclaimed on radio and in print media:

Also, I saw at once that the broadcasts should be followed up by continued public evangelistic services.

Therefore, I wrote to the small number of members on the mailing list I had—perhaps 150—the news of the forthcoming three-point campaign: (1) The half-hour Sunday radio program; (2) the new mimeographed magazine for interested listeners, *The Plain Truth*, and (3) personal public meetings ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The Plain Truth*, August 1960, p. 11).

The problem was, not only was there no immediate funding for the radio program, but neither was there funding for the new magazine. Yet Mr-s. Armstrong decided, with the support of the brethren, to step out in faith and launch this aggressive three-point campaign, trusting that God would provide the means for its success.

**The Official Launch**

On the first Sunday of 1934 (January 7), *The World Tomorrow* broadcast went on the air for the first time. Here is Mr. Armstrong’s account of the initial response to that broadcast, as well as the launching of the first issue of *The Plain Truth*:

Just as the 15-minute morning devotional programs had brought an unexpected mail response, so did the half-hour regular program of our own. Only it now brought a larger response. I began with the first broadcast, that first Sunday in 1934, inviting listeners to write in for the new magazine, *The Plain Truth*. 
At the same time I began work on producing Volume I and Number 1 of this magazine of my dreams. I did not even have a "scope" for hand-lettering the headlines. Neither did I have the regular mimeograph lettering guides for tracing, with the stylus, larger headlines. I was still living with the Fishers on their farm seven miles west of Eugene—my wife and children still at the Hall Street house in Salem. . . . That first issue of The Plain Truth was a pretty amateurish, home-made looking sort of thing. . . .

It was about November 1, 1933, that a few special offerings made it possible for us to purchase a very old, used, outdated Neostyle. It was a predecessor to the mimeograph. It was entirely hand operated. . . . We had also finally been able, before the first issue of The Plain Truth, to raise enough money to purchase a secondhand typewriter for $10.


This summarizes the early life and times of Mrs. Herbert Armstrong, up through the initial launch of that very humble evangelistic work which would thereafter revolutionize the concept of Christianity in the twentieth century.