

Interviewee: Rev Otto A. Burston

Interviewer: John W. Cooper, III

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Location: Wadsworth Congregational Church, 1301 Rock Creek Dairy Rd, Whitsett, NC 27377

Acronyms: OB: Otto Burston, JC (John W. Cooper, III)

JC: Good morning everybody. My name is John Cooper. Today I'm interviewing Reverend Otto a Burston, senior. How are you doing today, sir?

OB: Doing just fine. Thank you.

JC: Good, good. Just for the record. Can you tell me your date of birth and where you're from?

OB: Well, my date of birth is way back to September 7 1946. And I'm from originally from Baltimore, Maryland. Okay.

JC: Baltimore, Maryland. Who are who your parents were we what are your parents names?

OB: My parents names were my dad. He was a Earnest Lee Burston and my mother, God bless her, who passed away. When I was about three years old, was Mercia Burston, M er, C, I A, or C, A Burston, and I don't remember much about my mom. But my dad found he married another lady who cared for me during my adolescence. And up until I left home, who's Lucille Burston.

JC: So tell me about your your childhood growing up in Maryland. What was that, like?

OB: Let me tell you, My childhood was basically consisted of work. My dad had several businesses, and he would want us all children, it was seven of us to be a part of that business. And what happened, we would get up early in the morning, just like normal, you know, we went to school. But after school, we had to be at what we used to call the shop. And we worked there every day of the week. Sometimes we didn't have a Sunday. All but we did work. And I worked in that place from the age of maybe six or seven until I can remember, after high school, and I went into the military. So I went into the military and I think was July of 1964. And I did my time in the military. In the Air Force, United States Air Force. I came out of the air force in December of 1969. With the rank of a staff sergeant, and I've been out here, once I came out, I went back to work with my dad in the business.

JC: Tell me what your what was your experience like in the military in the Air Force? And why did you did you enlist or?

OB: Actually, you know, it was time, right around the beginning of the Vietnam War. And so you know, you either got drafted or you enlisted. So I figured rather than be drafted into doing something I didn't, I had in high school, I had a background and a curriculum and electronics. So I said the Air Force will probably be the best place. So I enlisted in the Air Force with the hopes

to you know, furthering my electronic Radio TV analysis and in the Air Force. When I went into the Air Force, I went through basic training, basic training, they sent me to tech school, but the time and to answer your question to time in the military, it was rewarding, but it was not what I really expected. How so? How so because I thought I was going to be dealing with electronics, but because of the way they classify you, and because of the needs of the country. They needed me in what they call aero space ground equipment. And what we worked on was mostly generators, engines, motors, you know, away from the tubes, resistance and all of that, but it was rewarding.

JC: Where were you-So what part of Vietnam are you stationed or were?

OB: I was stationed in Nha Trang Air Force Base in South Vietnam. I was stationed there for a little over a year. And we worked we performed our duties and did what we had to do After that, left there, they gave me the choice of assignments. That's what they were you get a choice of assignments. So I came in I said I wanted to be on the East Coast and give you that there was a lot of air force bases around my home. Andrews Air Force Base Bolling Air Force Base, even McGuire wasn't that far away up in New Jersey. But what happened was, and this is this is what took me out. They sent me to a place it was on the east coast. So they didn't fabricate it. It was on the east coast. But it was in caribou, Maine. And I worked for Air Force under under sack and caribou, Maine, I tell you, it was cold up there. It was so cold and so snowy, that I got there in that year. Just around Thanksgiving. I remember that. Because back in some of my papers back home, I stood at my Thanksgiving table setting. But Thanksgiving and what happened. I never saw the ground. I didn't see the ground until after my time was up in February, late February. And it was it was a quite a jump from Vietnam, to caribou, Maine. And I guess being a young man, I can see that now looking back on it, that, you know, sometimes you need to not make rash decisions. Because if I'd have stayed in, I would have been able to buy now within have been able to retire in the military with a decent rank. Because during those four years that I was in, I reached the rank of a staff sergeant, which was great during those times. So what I do, I got a little frustrated because of not getting the assignment into the assignment area that I wanted to get. And I was ready to just move on. That's what happened there.

JC: Understood. Just kind of backtrack just a little bit. Tell me about your your school experience. high school and middle school. Was that a? What was that like? And where did you attend?

OB: I attended school in Maryland in Baltimore, right? Okay, I graduated from Carver vocational technical high school in Baltimore, Maryland. And then I went on for after high school, I took some courses at what we used to call it BJC, Baltimore junior college in Baltimore. Until I went into the service. I just imagined while I was in, in a service, I was able to continue my education, because of the corresponding courses that we could take in the military encouraging us to continue education, so I didn't lose it. And after I came out of there, we came back to Baltimore, and I continued my education and graduated with a degree from college and went on from there.

And then after that, after that, I did a lot of different things and took a lot of different courses. But what I ended up doing was taking courses in Bible theology. And I went to church sponsored Christian Academy, a church sponsored College, C H Mason, Bible College. And Cha Mason is a Bible college that's all over the country, coming through the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God and crisis, educational outcomes, and not only got another AAA from situation, but I got my bachelor's degree through C. H. Bible college, all in our time, because I found the love For the word of God, and cutting through that school, and that denomination, I was able to find solace, find peace, find joy, and find out a little bit about myself. And what I was here to do, because before that, I was back in those days, I don't, you probably can't remember. But back in those days, you the whole emphasis on life was to get through school, get out, get a job. And along the way, was getting it, get a job, but still get an education. And then, but after that, what do you do with this education? How do you change the world? And not so you don't even really, at least I didn't I don't know about other people. But I didn't, I wasn't thinking about changing the world. I was just thinking about living in my own little community. And in my surroundings, my family, my church members, my peers. And that's the kind of life I lived.

JC: So so, you know, taking the theology classes as that's what really brought you into ministry. But was, was church a big part of your life growing up? I know, you talked about how you were working in the shop seven days a week. So sometimes Sundays were-

OB: Let me-I need to stress because even though some Sundays we work, we didn't work. My mother and dad, impressed upon us to go to service. Get out and go to church. Don't lay up here, get out and go to church. So I started church, you know, even when I was in high school, right? And I met a young man in high school who we became best friends, brother, Henry Davis, and he's, he's still my friend today. He lives in Baltimore. But him and I went to church together, week after week after week.

JC: What was the church called?

OB: Beg your pardon?

JC: What was the church that you attend with Mr. Davis?

OB: It was at Wayland Baptist church building Baptist Church in Baltimore. We went to church limited to some, here's here's where changed. I met my wife in 1973. You asked me Dezan Shira probably. Okay. But I met my wife in about 1973. And I was like I say, I was the person that just went around and did things long as I was able to get up, move around, acquire things on my own. And my wife was a when I met her. One of the things that she enjoyed at that time, was church too. So it was through her, and my involvement with her in a church, that the Lord really, almost like saved me. Because I was in the church, you know, you can be in the church and understand what they say, Now, you can be in the church, but not of the church. So I was just in the church. And I had I had a belief in myself about what they were teaching in the Scriptures. And what the Bible said, I knew what the Bible said, but I could not understand then. And it kept pondering

into my mind. What, whether or not this person that we can't see that supposedly talks to us, supposedly directs us. The real and I found out one Saturday afternoon, glory be to God, one Saturday afternoon, in a weekend, church conference. God touched me. And when he touched me, that began my real life in Christ. Because I was saying, and I would even go to the church, and I would sit there I would be nice, simple life. I would do everything that's expected of me, but in my heart, I would say it's a real but I'm gonna do this to save real, but he touched me that Saturday. And he just, I don't know whether you have ever had anybody lift you up, pick you up and Is toss you around, and you have no control whatsoever. That's what happened to me. God walked me through the pews. And all I can say they let me know that he is God all by himself. And He is all powerful. He could get through to you. When you can't get through to yourself, you can't help yourself. And he just pooped all over the floor. And all I could say he just made me say, Yes, God is real. God is real. I look if God is real, and for this day, right now I can tell you God is real, because of what he's done for me, and what he continues to do for me. And hallelujah, thank you be to God. And that's when I started taking the courses, as ch Mason understanding, you're still trying to be a good church goal. But understanding that there's something about God. And then when I found out more about God, I learned about his Son, Jesus Christ, who he said here, the Peter Pan penalty for my sins, on top of my sins, the sins that I have, even the sin when I didn't believe, if this is what I was perpetrating, and doing all of these things, but he said his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish. I don't have to die and go to hell, because of God and His Son, Jesus, because Jesus paid the price. He died on Jehovah's Claus for me, he brought me into the malas was like, he paid my sin debt. Because as I studied the word, they say the word it says the wages of sin is death. And I realized that I get sanded, falling short of the glory. But he said in his word, and that's what got me that helped me extremely. He said, If you confess your sins before He, God is faithful, and just to forgive you your sins, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. That's, that's, that's where I came into the Lord. And I joined it, I joined the Church of God in Christ. After that experience, before I was just going, and this was I think, grounding, I think, my certificate say, 2002, when I joined the Church of God in Christ, under the leadership of Dr. AR shields, a great man of God. And he preached, and I joined the church, and I took the Bible classes that I was taking the Bible study seriously. And I just, I just wanted to learn more about God. Want to learn more about this Jesus, who, who did as a fact come to find out later who denied himself didn't have to do it. But he did not itself that we might live all of the mess that I did, and I excuse me, no, it hammers a mess that I did. Coming up, even in my young age, run it just to enjoy life. The things I got into and now I have a clean sleep. Because there is a heaven. There is a hill and his life and his death in the Word of God, that tells us that it wants supported man to die. We all got to die, brother. But after death, the judgment and what are you going to be judged on? The things that you do in this life? And you did it you're only saving grace is that you come to Jesus. Because the only way to get to God the Father is bound to suck through his blood and glory. Hallelujah. I learned that that's that started me. I tell you back back back back up a little bit. When I was in the Church of God in Christ, my pastor, Dr. Shields would always keep me not knowing until now. later in life,

what he was doing was grooming me. For the ministry, boo me to be a servant of God, then say it, he would always tell me, Son, be humble, just stay humble. Whatever God has for you, he has for you just stay humble, to the point that even when I went to the Bible college, I didn't pick up, I just wanted to for general education. Because that's all I wanted to know, with general education about the word. And, by going through and getting all of that information, come to the point where I had enough credits at all, to graduate from that college with a degree in Biblical Studies. And God bless me from there. I was in the church. I was a deacon in the church. I've been a trustee in a church, and I was a deacon in the church, and I became a minister in the church. And after becoming a Minister, in the church, our elders board in Maryland first jurisdiction consecrated me as an elder, in the Church of God in Christ. And that information, and even before I became an elder, my pastor, Dr. Shield, because he was superintendent of a district, there was a churches that were the pastor was sick. And he said, You go down there, and minister to those people. And in the absence of Reverend who, that's what Reverend Reverend James, you go down and minister to him, to those people. And before I knew it, again, that that's the best while I'm gracious here, because it's a it's a family church. They didn't have 152, 100. Maybe they didn't have 50. Members. But the people had a love for God. And that's what I want. And that's what God put me in place where people had a love for God. And I stayed there. And that church, by the grace of God in Christ, Church of God in Christ in for what about 10 to 12 years, mentioned because the pastor finally passed, and his family was there, and we ministered to them and other people who came and went, but God kept us. God was the reason. You know, I don't have I don't have, you know, I don't have no fancy titles, anything even today. As a matter of fact, things weren't and they started to die off. It was time in our life. My wife and I, my wife had worked and supported me and our work and we supported each other. But time came for her to retire. I have a daughter who lives here, my son went to graduate from a&t. And he graduated electrical engineer. My daughter worked down here. And she was teaching or working in human resources at 80. And she would bring her children to Maryland. It wasn't a month that passed that I didn't see him because she would get in a car and drive down up to Maryland. So that I can see the grandkids. Love the grandkids. And after that, when time came for my wife paying to retirement time, and I'm talking about this is years that's going on, this is not something that just happened, you know, a couple of weeks ago and it was years that goes on and so said it's time to retire. I was already retired because the company I had worked for which was surly company doing my work experience I'd worked for them in the hosiery division. And, and they I worked for them for about what was over 10 years. And they decided that they were going to change the way that they do business. They used to do business direct store delivery. And I was in IT realm of the business selling ladies pantyhose, which is kind of strange. I thought back then for man, but that's what that's what we did. But when they went out, and they we switch me around to several jobs and a company that part of the hotel business was doing going through a restructuring. And it kept you long, as long as they could. As long as there was a space, then it came upon to me that I was laid off. And rather than lay me off, they let me they retired me. So I've retired. And during that time, I had some illnesses and whatnot. And I retired. And after I

retired. That was it, I became disabled. And what happened was, I was home, doing what I could, and studying and spending time with the Lord. And then when my wife said it was time for her retire. Well, let's move on. Let's go. So she said we will. Let's try North Carolina. So we came down here to visit here in North Carolina. And I enjoyed it. I loved it. As a matter of fact, because of the pace of life here. It was a lot less hectic. And that's what I needed in my life. Some calm, some reserved some peace. So we retired and moved here in North Carolina. And I'm going just going through my life for you. I don't know whether exhibit what you want to go at-?

JC: Your going at the pace. Yeah, because I want to talk about how you became a pastor at the church. Yeah, right now.

OB: Okay, here we go.

JC: Yes, exactly. Your going at the right pace.

OB: Well praise God because that's what happened. replace or praise God? Because that's what happened. We came down here to retire. And I think we know I will not. I said, God, understanding. This is me talking again. I said, Well, I'm gonna sit back and enjoy the Lord. And I'm not gonna pastor anymore. So we searched for church. And it was, it was strange and funny, but it was strange had happened. One of the members of the church's husband, his name is elder sans ribbon shop, says his wife was in the beauty shop next to where my wife and I were that day, getting out. My wife had treated me to some of the better things like getting my nails done, and my feet and pedicure pedicure and manicure. And she came in. And I just walked up to us as you from around here. She says, yeah. I said, because we were searching for churches. I say because we lived here in Whitson, right? I say, where do you go to church? What do people do? She says, Well, I go to Greensboro. So I'll see see, but there is a little church, up dish row, right around the corner and up the road. He says an older congregation. But my husband's brother go there and he goes there sometimes and we want to, you might want to check them out. I said, Okay, so that's what my wife and I did. Very first chance we got visited several churches up and down this area. And when we got there that Sunday, when I walked in the door, I was greeted with such smiles and such warmth and such joy that it just took off from just the welcome. And then we passed a wound Wooten got up and acknowledged the guest guest and my wife and I, and preached. I say, This is it. This is it. I went back a couple of times. I even brought my mother in law with us and we went to and that's that's the church. So that's where we join the church. And my intention was to join the church and stay there because that would be church home for me. So we joined the church, and we set it to Congress under the leadership of Pastor Wooten. And we just had a wonderful time. Pastor Wooten was there and they had a couple other ministers are Reverend Sands was there. Forgive me because I'm getting a little welled up and can't remember all of the names. But we worship there. Then the pastor wounded cut things on the shore, Pastor Wooten got sick. And Pastor Wooten pass. And it was time for the church to get another pastor, oh, my God, what Pastor was there, he allowed me he found out my credentials. He allowed me to speak every night. And I became a part of the church body. We fellowship with

the saints there with the men, and the women, my wife with the women. And we just had I was just at home, not knowing just because it was a church of love, a church award, not knowing what was going to happen. Had no idea, no ambition, at that time to pass the church, just to enjoy the Lord. For time after pastor would pass, time came, and they had a search committee to find a new pastor. I wasn't on none of that. But they just searched. And they search. And they brought in pastors from that they had heard seen, knew about all around to interview with the search committee. And for some, it was for God, it was God. I'm not gonna say for some reason, it was God's God, that say, it was God's anointing that said, that I should be the pastor. And they chose me to pass that church. And all I could do again, we'll say, Yes, Lord, you know, our guest, I really didn't ask you if I could reach out, especially since you got me here, doing something else. So I accepted the call as pastor Wadsworth, Congregational Church. But it was after the search, and a search for well over a year if I'm not mother was it was almost two years before they decided that, you know, and I was just one of them. I was just doing what God would have me to do. And we became pastor, discreet church, father about as much of the history as we could, but find out about the love of the people. And they have hunger and thirst for the Word of God, that hunger and thirst for God. And so that's where we are now. We just hunger and thirst for God. There's a scripture that says about the church, and he says, some plant some water, but God gives the increase. I don't see it. That's what you hear. I keep referring to God, but God is all the way in this walk. God is everywhere in this world. He controls everything. Okay, and he makes things happen. I'm there to just water are the flock,. Continue to feed them of the Word of God. That's what I got my degree in, Bible theology. So that's what I'm doing, telling them about the goodness of God, and showing them in the Word of God, you know what he's done, and how he didn't just start doing it. He did it down through the ages. Down through the ages, from Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the prophets. Through the New Testament, through Jesus, to the apostles, through Paul. God's hand has been all the way through that's the, that's the c constant that I can see, all the way. And we got to know that he is who we owe out allegiance to. He is who controls this whole situation. It's not you. It's not I, it's not, you know, people come and people go, even some of them were very well known, and very prosperous and well spoken men of God have gone on, by the way. But who's still living? Who's still here? Who's still real. Who's still real. Tell me who's still real God is! People have talked about him down through the years for century. But God is the one that keeps it. And that's, that's, that's my mission here is to continue to let people know that God is real, and that God loves you and he loves you Regardless who you are. Look at who he did with the Israelites. Look at how he kept him. But look at how you chastised him. When he wouldn't do right. He said, I'll be your God, if you'd be by people. And when they read through so many struggles, and they walked away from God, all they had to do was do what? Cry out to him! And he cried out, they cried out to him, and he came back and brought him in. So I love him today. Because I look at that, and look at my life. I've made some mistakes. I don't want to sit here and tell nobody, that I've been perfect. I have not been perfect. But I made some mistakes. But through it all. God has kept me and he continues to keep me today. The church that we have, yet we've had some ups and we've had

some downs, but God still has his people there who loves his work, still have those there who love Him and love His Son, Jesus. And that's what is saved. God gave His only begotten son. That whosoever what? What did I say? What does scripture say? Believing in Him? And what did I say? I say, I believe, I believe, yes, God, I believe, I believe in God the Father, I believe in God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. So I'm just grateful to God for where he's brought me and where he's brought us as a church. And I came in his church, and I found this church is over 154 years now. I believe am I right mother. Yes. All right. So you know, God has kept us this church for over 154 years. And he keeps on keeping us he keeps making ways out of no ways. How do we do it? Because of him. Not because we have no outpour of finances from no other place, what it's all about his spirit, and believing in Him and doing what he asked us to do, and getting the blessing that the whole world belongs to him. Do you realize that sir? The whole world belongs to God and God is the one that releases his resources. What's the sound on the on the front of the church? Did you read the marquee out there?

JC: I did not.

OB: Huh?

JC: I did not.

OB: Did not. The marquee says our resources are limited, but God's resources is unlimited. So don't tell them what we can do because we do not dependent upon us and to credit, they're not dependent upon me. They are dependent upon God, all I got to do is keep God in the forefront and keep them worshiping God. So that's where we are today. And that's where I come from, and way back for a little boy. Kind of funny thing about it. I was born in Baltimore. But I was raised right here in North Carolina for a few years of my life. Lived right down the road there, Rocky Mountain, North Carolina. That's where my dad's home was and when my real mother got sick, he would bring us down here, and my grandmother would take care of us. But I've come this far, leaning on the Lord. Not always knowing, but he has brought me this far and I can look back now so he hasn't brought me this far to leave me. He said he'd be with us, always. And he's been with me. He's been with this church 154 plus years. Do you realize that? We you know, when you think about the goodness of Jesus, and all that he's done for us, you can't help but say hallelujah, hallelujah. Hallelujah, thank God, for blessing me. We're here because of the blessings of God. I'm here because of the blessings of God. Hallelujah. I didn't. I didn't even aspire to be a bishop, or nobody. That's what he used to say you go people who come up the ladder, you be a bishop. Nah. just want to be a servant and that's what God has done. So, I pray that that gives you some insight of who I am. And where we are here and watch what we're here to endeavor to continue to keep God and Jesus in front of the people. He gave His life for us. Don't start me preaching. He gave his life for us. That whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. You gotta leave him one day. That's a point that we got to leave here. But I still want to spend eternity with Him. And He showed me that it's possible.

JC: So that's it. Well that was great. Really got some insight about you and how you became the pastor of this church. So I thank you for being willing to be an interview participant for my project.

OB: You're welcome.

JC: Thank you, sir.

OB: God bless you.

JC: God bless you.