

# “There Are No Atheists in Foxholes”: Meet Elder Chuck Bowers

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*"One time going out on a night mission, one of the other guys came up to me and said, 'How about trading me seats?' That had never happened before. Well, anyway, they went out and crashed. And got killed."*

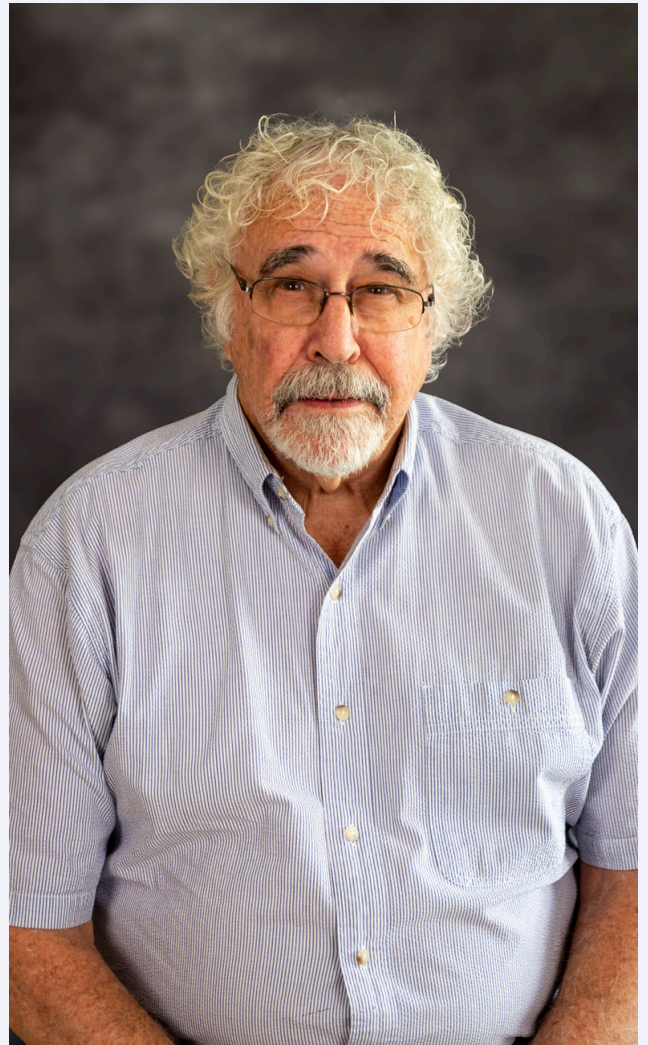
In the chaos of Vietnam, a simple seat swap forever altered Chuck Bowers' perspective on faith and divine purpose. The Marine helicopter pilot who should have been on that doomed aircraft instead found himself contemplating a profound question: *"Maybe there's a reason."*

## Springfield Roots and Military Wings

Chuck's story begins just blocks from First & Calvary, where his parents lived in an apartment near SMS (now Missouri State University) when he was born. A Springfield native through and through, Chuck attended Parkview High School before enrolling at SMS, graduating in 1965 with the Vietnam War escalating.

*"My government, in its infinite wisdom, decided that I was going to get involved in it,"* Chuck recalls with characteristic dry humor.

Initially planning to join the reserves to satisfy his draft requirements, a recruiter suggested he take officer candidate tests. After completing Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia, a moment of inspiration struck while training.



*"We were running up and down the hills, and I'd see these helicopters flying over," he remembers. "That looks like a better thing than carrying a rifle and a pack up and down these hills."*

Chuck seized the opportunity, training first as a fixed-wing pilot in Pensacola before specializing in helicopters. During this period, he married, and after additional training in California, deployed to Vietnam.

## Faith Forged in Fire

Unlike many whose faith journeys begin in childhood church services, Chuck's deepest spiritual convictions were tested and solidified in combat.

*"I had always believed," he explains, "but I had some moments in Vietnam that were pretty defining. I'm a firm believer that there are no atheists in a foxhole."*

The 1968 Tet Offensive, when North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched coordinated attacks, brought this reality home. Chuck vividly recalls sheltering in bunkers during rocket, artillery, and mortar attacks.

*"I can remember being in a bunker with rockets hitting around and thinking, 'Oh God, make them stop,'" he says quietly.*

These experiences, more than any single person's influence, shaped his faith. When asked who most influenced his spiritual journey, Chuck simply replies, *"Events."*

## Finding Home at First & Calvary

Chuck's connection to Presbyterian churches spans his lifetime. As a toddler, his family attended Westminster Presbyterian at Cherry and National. Later, his parents became founding members of South Minister Presbyterian Church.

During high school, Chuck's first direct connection to First & Calvary came through Sea Scouts, an advanced level of Boy Scouts that met at the church. This early association would prove meaningful years later.

After 20 years of military service, Chuck retired in 1986 and returned to Springfield. Though he and his wife visited several churches, First & Calvary felt like coming home. He has been a member for nearly four decades since.

## Called to Lead

When Kent Shaller approached Chuck about becoming an elder, the decision required thoughtful consideration. What ultimately led him to accept was a sense that his life experiences offered something valuable to the congregation.

*"I felt that life's events and experiences gave me something to offer," he explains.*

Chuck does express one regret—that hearing difficulties resulting from years around aircraft engines have limited his involvement. *"I feel that maybe I missed my time. If I had gotten involved earlier, I could have given more or done more."*

As an elder, Chuck particularly appreciates *"how open the session is with information and things that are discussed."* His passion centers around "congregational life"—the church as a living community.

*"The people, the association, the people coming together and doing things... a search for a higher meaning and purpose in life,"* he reflects.

## Rooted in Scripture

Chuck maintains his faith through daily Bible reading, finding particular meaning in the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:5—*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength"*—which Jesus later identified as the greatest commandment.

*"Jesus goes on to say that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself,"* Chuck notes, referencing the parallel passages in Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30.

Another verse that sustains him comes from Deuteronomy 31:8: *"The Lord goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you or forsake you."*

In recent years, Chuck credits Neil Stenger, his Sunday school leader and a friend of nearly 70 years, with influencing his faith journey.

## Looking Forward

When asked what excites him about First & Calvary's current season, Chuck's admiration for church leadership shines through.

*"I think we're very fortunate in having Pastor Don. He's amazing, full of energy, ideas, and thoughts. He's open, he's personable,"* Chuck says. *"He thinks big and is forward-looking."*

With the church approaching its 95th anniversary, Chuck's hopes are straightforward but profound: *"I hope to be around for the hundredth, and I hope it's around for another hundred after that."*

To newcomers wondering if they might find a place at First & Calvary, Chuck offers simple but heartfelt reassurance: *"We're here and we're open and there's a place for everybody. We're available."*

## Beyond the Elder's Role

When he's not serving the church, Chuck enjoys conversations over coffee and exploring history. A self-described man of "a plethora" of interests, he particularly enjoys short YouTube videos that satisfy his curiosity about various subjects.



*"I can find interest in anything," he says, adding, "I recognize time and don't like to waste it."*

If granted the opportunity to have coffee with anyone from Scripture, Chuck's choice reflects the straightforward clarity of his faith: *"I think it'd be Jesus."*

From the cockpit of a Marine helicopter to the elder board at First & Calvary, Chuck Bowers' journey illustrates how faith formed in life's crucibles can lead to decades of steady service. His story reminds us that sometimes the most profound spiritual insights come not from theological education but from moments when we find ourselves in foxholes—literal or figurative—calling out to a God who never leaves or forsakes us.

## From Math to Ministry: Meet Elder Courtney Pybas

*Read Her Story Here:*

