

# Professor as Disciple-Maker: The Life and Work of Sue Russell

The logo for the Evangelical Missiological Society (ems) is displayed in orange lowercase letters within a dark blue circular background.

**ANTHONY CASEY**

**Vol 2:2 2022**

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Each Fall, JEMS features a life-history style interview with a missiologist in an effort to give readers a glimpse of the person behind the books and ideas. We are excited to feature Sue Russell, Professor of Mission and Contextual Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. This interview was conducted by Anthony Casey and has been lightly edited for length and with an effort to retain a conversational tone.

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## **Anthony Casey**

Dr. Sue Russell, thanks so much for sharing a little bit about how God has worked and directed your life over the years. Would you mind sharing a little bit about where you grew up and what your early years were like?

## **Sue Russell**

I grew up in Southern California, two blocks from Disneyland. I remember our favorite thing was every Saturday we went to the beach - Lifeguard Station Number 19 at Newport Beach. My dad took us way out and we'd body surf back. The beach was a huge part of my life. I was always interested in sports as well. We didn't have girls my age on our block, so I played baseball with the boys when someone saw me around and recruited me for their team. Later, my mom signed our family up for a softball league.

As a kid I wanted to be three things in life. I got it in my head that I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I didn't know girls didn't play professional baseball at the time. I wanted to be a fireman. This was before Title 9, so girls weren't supposed to do these things. I had no role models in this, but I knew I wanted to be a fireman. And the third was getting into backpacking. I wanted to be a mountaineering teacher, so those were my goals.

Sports and academics have been major influences in my life. Sixth-grade students played the faculty every year in a softball game. The 6th graders voted who would play in the game, and all the girls just voted for the most popular girl. But I had been playing baseball with the guys every day at recess, so they all voted for me! So, I got to play in that game and then I just continued playing sports as much as I could.

Coaches and teachers had a major impact on my life because they took an interest in me and encouraged me. I was involved in band and the band instructor invited me to join different music groups. He was as pleased as I was when I was voted “Best Bandsman” my senior year. Many other teachers took me under their wing and because of them I thrived in school. I didn’t realize I was good at math until I started winning the math award. One science teacher allowed me to do an independent science project studying the environmental impact of a proposed development. I ended up getting 1st place in the science fair and later the student athlete of the year award, as well as award for top science student of our graduating year.

I also was given amazing opportunities in sports. Title IV came out while I was in high school. Although I played on the girls’ softball team, we didn’t have the dedicated coaching the boys team received. The coach of the junior varsity baseball team was my chemistry teacher, and I was an A+ student so he let me play on the junior varsity baseball team with the boys. We got to practice with the varsity team and their coach had been a professional catcher, which was my position, so I was able to get some really good coaching at those practices.

I also enjoyed the outdoors and was part of a mountaineering Girl Scout troop in High School. So although my friends wanted to be doctors and lawyers, I wanted to have a career outdoors. I was actually going to join the Navy to study meteorology but when I went to sign the final papers, they couldn’t guarantee the school. So instead, I applied to Humboldt State University in California as a chemistry major. I wanted to eventually get into their forest management program. I wasn’t planning to play softball, but someone saw me throwing the ball across the quad and recruited me. So, I ended up majoring in chemistry and playing college softball, the latter of which ended up having a lifetime impact on me by exposing me to the gospel.

My chemistry grades were good and I got into the forest management program. As a summer job I worked for the National Forest Service as a firefighter. I also went to the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and spent thirty days mountaineering in the Rockies. At the end of the course, they asked me to come back and take their leadership course so I could become one of their instructors. I was now living my

childhood dreams; I was playing softball at the highest level, fighting fires for the Forest Service, and on my way to becoming a mountaineering instructor. But in my heart, I knew something was missing.

I was raised in the church, but when my parents divorced when I was 16, I wanted no part of Christianity. However, over the years I found that I felt close to God when I was in the mountains. But it was while I was at NOLS that I began to find my way back to God. We had a freak snowstorm in the middle of that thirty-day trip, 10,000 feet up on a mountain near the Continental Divide. We were stuck there for three days, never really in danger because of our seasoned leadership, but still just trying to keep warm. I remember going out of my tent and seeing a magnificent full moon and everything covered in white. I just sat on a rock and remember feeling very close to God and thinking of the John Denver song Rocky Mountain High – “talk to God and listen to the casual reply.” I realized that as close as I felt to God, I didn’t know how to talk to Him. It created a longing in my heart to know how to connect with God.

The next step on this journey was in the form of Judy, a new girl who was trying out for the softball team – my position actually, though she didn’t realize that I was the all-conference catcher. My coach asked me to work with her in case I got injured. I wasn’t too thrilled about that. But here’s this gal, who will probably never play an inning, but she outworks all of us. We’re like, “Judy, just chill!” She wore this t-shirt that I recognized as something Christian. So, I’m watching her – she’s a Christian, she loves everyone, and everyone seems to love her, and she is outworking all of us. I had to figure out what made her tick! So, I started asking her questions but later she told me she was too intimidated of me to really share her faith.

She also later told me she brought the director of Cru for our campus to my dorm window where they would pray for me every week. We soon became friends and decided to be roommates the following year. I really wanted to be like Judy so when she started a series on 10 steps to Christian maturity, I decided to do the same one. But since I am competitive, I thought I would do these faster and better. I started with the book she skipped called, Knowing Christ personally. I’m in my room going over the Bible study on my own and I got overwhelmed with the love of Christ. I wanted that love in my life and prayed to receive His love. When Judy found out, she connected me with her discipler, and we met every week for three years. She just loved me. I’m this crusty, tomboyish softball player and she’s this Barbie-type person – pink and things. Not my style! But she came to all of our home softball games and by the end of the year, half the team were Christians! We are still friends forty years later! We meet every summer when I’m in Southern California.

Cru infused in me a desire for evangelism and discipleship. We did that all over the Humboldt State campus and then I'd go on the summerlong Cru mission trips. It was a great experience! God was working in me. I realized there were three things that were of eternal significance: God, His Word, and people. As I neared graduation, I'd fought enough forest fires to know that working in forest management did not lead to things eternal. I entered college thinking living in a forest by myself was the perfect career. Christ began to change those feelings, so I sat down and prayed for direction. I wanted to be involved in evangelism and discipleship using the unique gifts and training God had given me. I had no cross-cultural experience, but I thought, Lord, if you have me overseas, let it be China. I had a close friend from Taiwan, so that influenced me there.

### **Anthony**

Hold on a minute! It sounds like you're in the middle of a major life event here. Where were your parents in all this? What did they think as you are on this path increasingly devoted to Jesus?

### **Sue**

My parents had divorced when I was 16 and once I started college I was living on my own. My dad just kind of tolerated these things. My mom always went to church. We were nominal Methodists because her parents were Methodist. I never really knew what my mother thought about my devotion to Christ until her memorial service. One of her friends sought me out and told me that my mother was so curious about what took me all the way to SE Asia that she joined a Bible study called Experiencing God. When my sister and I talked, she was convinced that this is when my mother came to a personal faith in Christ.

### **Anthony**

Alright. So, what about at college? I guess you've sort of stumbled into realizing you're academically gifted. Did you have any college professors in particular that influenced you along the way?

### **Sue**

Not so much with the professors. It was mostly my coaches who had the bigger impact. But a cool story about my seemingly unlikely major – forest management – and how it actually prepared me for my later work with Wycliffe Bible Translators. I had a forest

management capstone class where you're actually developing a long-term plan for the forest. You know, integrating wildlife, fisheries, recreation, hunting, timber, that kind of stuff. I loved that class. I was really good at it. It just made sense to me the importance of managing the forest and integrating all of these activities into a healthy system. I didn't realize how that was preparing me for what God was going to call me to as a translation project manager for Wycliffe.

### **Anthony**

Wow. That's neat. So how did you get from college to SE Asia with Wycliffe?

### **Sue**

I was about to graduate and actually thought I might join staff with Cru. But I considered my background and training and just didn't end up feeling that was the right path. I prayed, "Lord, let me slow down here and see what you have." I tend to go full steam ahead in general but now I didn't know what I was going to do. I looked at all kinds of ministry organizations but did not even consider Wycliffe because I really struggled with learning languages.

### **Anthony**

That's interesting, because maybe I'm off here, but it seems like a lot of people that are really good at math, and chemistry is sort of like math as well, tend to do well in languages. Do you know if there's a reason why you didn't like languages at the time.

### **Sue**

Well, I don't know why, I just really struggled with learning languages so didn't think I would be a good fit in an organization that worked with languages. Anyway, here I am praying for direction. My roommate received the Wycliffe magazine, but I had never seen a copy. But one day I came home and there was one on the counter with a big headline that said: Lost! The feature story was about someone who had gotten lost at jungle camp and a search had been organized. I'm reading and thinking, "They really don't know how to do this! Maybe you could use someone like me who could teach you how to survive in the wilderness." So, I tore out the little coupon in the magazine for more information and mailed it in. I read all the information they sent me and thought, wow, here's a great way to do evangelism, reading Scripture to people in their own



language and asking what it means. And what a great way to do discipleship, going through the whole Bible with someone verse by verse as you translate it. So, Wycliffe ends up hitting one of my requests to be involved in evangelism and discipleship. But I still had a problem with languages, which were not my gift.

A couple in my church had a daughter who was actually with Wycliffe so I asked if I could meet with them. I'm still wondering just how my talents and abilities might fit. Out of the blue during the meeting the dad asks me if I'm good at math. Of course, I'm good at math! It's always been my best subject. So, he says, well my daughter says if you're good at math, you'd be good at linguistic analysis. My mind really begins working now! That is two of my criteria, but I knew that Wycliffe was not working in China.

Spring Break senior year of college I'm visiting my mom back in Southern California where Wycliffe's headquarters were at that time. I decided to visit their campus and ended up in a chapel service. Who was speaking, but linguistic legend Kenneth Pike! He was announcing Wycliffe's new partnerships in Asia, and I just said, "OK Lord, this is it!"

I had no idea what linguistics was or that I needed to take some graduate classes in Dallas to prepare but I moved in that direction, began raising support, and God serendipitously provided the money I needed for the first term through a roofing project I stumbled upon (yes, I used to be a roofer!), and the rest is history!

## **Anthony**

That is a phenomenal story! Praise God! So, tell us something about your time in SE Asia and what the work was like.

## **Sue**

First we learned the national language and then began work on the local language. The gospel had spread to about half of the 40,000 speakers about 40 years previous to our arrival. However, they still did not have Scripture in their language and the church was requesting a translation. The Bible Society decided to sponsor the translation project. We hired translators and then I needed to find people who would be readers and part of a translation committee. I began visiting all of the sixty little churches scattered around five river watersheds. After two weeks and sixty churches I couldn't find anyone that wanted to help! I got back and wrote one of those letters you're not supposed to write to your supporting churches. I thought to myself, if these people don't even care about

their own translation project, what am I doing here. Those were the days of snail mail, so you have to wait weeks for a response to arrive. They wrote back and said hang in there and we are praying for you.

About that time God put on my mind this man called Jimmy Libau. I had met him at one of the translation workshops and appreciated his leadership. I just had this sense that I needed to go find him, but I had no idea where he was. I employed the famous Jungle Telegraph where you go around and ask who knows Jimmy, where has he lived? Eventually I got directions to his house. I get there and we start talking. He begins telling me about his vision to form a committee of local leaders who would oversee the project and make sure the translation got done. I had no idea at the time, but he had heard about this project and had been looking for me to see if he could help! He was the man for the job because two weeks later we had our first meeting as a translation committee!

We had to figure out who's in charge of this committee, well I did anyway. They wanted to call me a missionary, but I was like no, no you can't call me that in this country. Then they wanted to call me a pastor but, no, I'm not the pastor! So, they settled on younger sister. What I didn't know was because of my age I was too young to be seen as a leader in that culture. Young people were under the authority of the elders. I was able to do all the training for translation principles, reading groups, the accuracy checks, and so on under their authority.

It was difficult at times because it was easy to think I was leading things. But the real turning point in the project was during the planning for our second meeting to check translation. I went to Jimmy's house and discovered the translation committee had already decided on the place and date for the next checking session. Because I thought I needed to be there, I asked Jimmy to change the dates based on my travel schedule. Well, the Holy Spirit made it clear to me that that wasn't my decision and I apologized to Jimmy. He had planned things around the school calendar so that the most educated people in the community, the schoolteachers, could participate. I got back from a Wycliffe meeting out of the area to find people doing exactly what they should be – checking translated Scripture for clarity and accuracy and teaching others the translation principles. It was amazing! But the Lord was not done with me. During the first day back, I got really sick and was out of commission for the rest of the week.

So, I'm laying in bed in at the pastor's house when I begin to hear singing at 8:00 that night. This goes on all week. What I didn't know is Jimmy had visited the church and

decided that they would have revival meetings. The committee checked translation from 8am to 4pm, and then held revival meetings from 8pm to 4am. The revival led to attracting many people from the area who ended up helping with translation. I literally saw anthropology at work as the people used their cultural community feasts to provide food and housing for large numbers of people who helped with the translation checking sessions. So over about five years revival broke out in the villages.

God used the project to help the church leaders achieve their visions. It was difficult for an individual church to have the funds for an initiative, but the project brought the churches together. Churches asked the committee if they would produce a songbook. So, they gathered local indigenous songwriters to write songs sung in churches. I helped train people on a computer to produce the music and compile the songbook. They formed a choir to perform all the songs and we recorded those sessions and sent cassette tapes to all the churches in the area so people could learn the songs.

They also were committed to evangelizing non-Christian communities. In their culture, young people could not go up to older people and preach to them. However, they could take the new Bible translation and ask non-believers if they could read to them and ask them if the translation was good in their language. It became a great way to do evangelism. The committee put together a small evangelism team using this approach. My home church bought a boat, engine, and fuel and the committee provided the personnel. Those evangelists spent two years doing translation checks in 14 villages who had been hostile to the gospel. They would simply read the new translation and have a question-and-answer session. Over time they went through the whole New Testament. Two years later on Christmas Day, Jimmy tells the evangelists that the people are ready. They put out the call, "Who wants to be a follower of Jesus?" Over 300 hundred people were baptized, and seven churches were planted that Christmas Day.

Another project the committee was involved with was literacy. About 50% of the women in the community were not literate. I had talked to Jimmy about the need for literacy but the committee had other priorities. However, I created a primer, writing book, and teacher's manual and made 50 sets of material. Near the end of the project, Jimmy talked about the need for more people to read the Scripture and I asked, "What about the people who don't know how to read?" He said, "You are right, you better do something about it." So, the committee asked each village to send one person to become their literacy teacher to the next committee checking session. I helped train them, gave them materials, and they went back to their villages to begin literacy classes.



People ask me, “Why Forest management?” Well, what the committee needed was someone to put together a long-term plan for translation, evangelism, discipleship, literacy, and song writing. I would have never thought it, but my forest management program in college gave me exactly the training and skills needed to help the church leaders fulfill their vision for their community.

### **Anthony**

Wonderful. Well, we could spend days on that, but how do you know when your time is coming to an end with that kind of a thing? How did you end up transitioning to the next phase of life?

### **Sue**

When the New Testament was done, the committee and I both felt for the good of the community’s standing in the denomination, they needed to do the Old Testament on their own. I had been there about eight years without a real furlough other than short trips home, so I took my furlough to finish my MA while they started the OT project. I had worked with Sherwood and Judy Lingenfelter when they were anthropology consultants on the field, and I thought I would enjoy continuing to learn from them. I could finish a master’s degree in a semester with my previous courses in linguistics. I had some visa issues getting back to the field long-term, so I decided to start the D.Miss at Biola while taking short visits back to SE Asia.

During this time, I met David, my husband now, who was working at Biola and we had conversations off and on and after three years he finally asked me out. He’s kind of shy, but we really liked each other. But I had made a commitment to the church to go back until the Old Testament was finished. I knew the Bible Society might pull their funding if SIL wasn’t involved so I told them I’d be involved until the OT was finished. As much as I liked David, I had promised I’d go back overseas. He kind of disappeared because he faced a dilemma. He didn’t feel called overseas, but he didn’t want to make it harder for me. So, I went back and then after three years the OT had been drafted and I was doing my next year’s planning and I realized I was done with the project. For the first time in 15 years, I had no long term commitments.

I came home to California that Spring because my mother had went into critical care. The day she got out Doug Hayward at Biola had a heart attack. I had been his grader while working on my degree, so I ended up finishing teaching his classes that term

before heading back to SE Asia. One day as I was leaving campus I happened to bump into David. And he's like hi, what are you doing? I said well, I'm finishing up the translation project. He heard finished, and he asked me out. We dated for two months while I waited for my mother to be released from the hospital and realized we were serious about our relationship.

You asked, “How do you finish up a career as a Bible translator?” David and I had been talking and because of my unique situation I knew he was planning on coming to SE Asia at Christmas to ask me to marry him. He pretty much had to tell me six months in advance because I needed that much time to disengage from everything I was doing on the field. But, how do you say goodbye to the community where you’ve lived for fifteen years and an adopted brother and family who has taken care of you that whole time? I asked David how he felt about paying my adopted brother a water buffalo as a way to honor and thank him for all his care. I didn't think anything about it, and I got this e-mail from David: “A water buffalo? What's a water buffalo?” But I explained the cultural significance and David agreed to go through the full village cultural engagement ceremony.

So, David came out to my village and went through the ceremony, complete with water buffalo. In that culture, once the bride wealth is paid, the woman is expected to go back to her husband’s village. So, the following day my brother and his family cleaned out all my stuff from my village house as part of the bride wealth and then waved goodbye! So that’s how I ended up closing out my time in SE Asia and moving to California where I started teaching at Biola.



David already worked at Biola, and I began adjunct teaching. One day David said, “You should take this Greek class. It’s a whole year of Greek in seven weeks. You’re good at languages.” Not really, but I took it and that ended up leading me down the path to full time faculty at Biola.

### **Anthony**

You said you had been a TA, so you had gotten a little bit of a taste of teaching. Did you have aspirations to become a professor, or did you just stumble down the path and things opened up.

## Sue

I've always had a heart for discipling college students. Campus Crusade gave me that. My last year in the village, I had a college intern come out for six months and working with her just reignited my passion for discipling college students. She'd got so excited about what was happening with the translation project, and she also was a speed typist. You have to back translate the whole New Testament into English for consultant checking. It would take me forever to do just a little. She was a speed typist, so we spent two hours every morning on that. I would read the local translation and translate to English, and she would type it.

That gave me the longing again to work with college students, but I didn't know what that would look like since I was in a village in SE Asia. But when I came back and got married, I was reading Matthew 28, the classic Great Commission passage. It hit me that nothing had changed for me. My main vocation is to make disciples, whether in SE Asia or in a classroom in Los Angeles. So, I saw teaching, not necessarily as being a professor, but being able to disciple students. And I had the privilege of teaching a required Bible class that taught mission through the book of Acts. I had 200 students a semester with whom to teach missions in the Bible and talk about my time in SE Asia. Over time at Biola, I got to disciple 6,000 students in missions and missional living. I had only been a Christian for three years before moving overseas so I was really socialized as a Christian in the village culture in SE Asia. So, I brought that community aspect to the classes I was teaching. I got into education out of a desire to disciple.

## Anthony

Yeah, that's a good way to put it and a very applicable way to describe Christian professors as well. Did you have any trouble adapting to the academic world or did you just sort of hit your stride?

## Sue

I've always been kind of geeky and SIL encourages going to conferences and presenting. I had done research and presented quite a bit on language assessment in multilingual contexts. There was a nearby country to where I lived that had an outstanding linguistics library that I'd visit on visa runs. I'd worked with Sherwood Lingenfelter on some projects. Then I took graduate classes on furloughs. So, I had been around the academic environment over the years. The hardest thing for me was actually the gender debate in ministry that was going on at the time. It wasn't an issue in Asia, so I first heard about it at Biola. Based on my experience in anthropology and living in a group-

oriented culture, I felt people were making a construct that wasn't in the Bible. That actually got me into my PhD program at UCLA because I didn't have the academic credentials in New Testament to be able to address that as a New Testament scholar as well as an anthropologist.

### **Anthony**

So, you did a PhD at UCLA, but you had already been a professor at Biola, right?

### **Sue**

Yes. I was presenting in these areas but realized that to really have credibility to say what I was saying, I needed the New Testament degree.

### **Anthony**

Sure, let's get to that in a second, but when you were a student and then an early professor at Biola, there were some really prominent figures there in missiology. Certainly, the Lingenfelters. Who were some of your colleagues there and what were these people like as neighbors down the hall?

### **Sue**

When I came to Biola it was really weird. I knew Sherwood on the field and then I go back to Biola and he was the Provost. I walked into his office once and said, "Hey, can I see Sherwood?" They all look at me going, "Do you have an appointment with Doctor Lingenfelter?" I'm like, whoops! So yes, I knew Sherwood and Judy. We were really blessed at Biola to have a number of outstanding missiologists. Doug Hayward brought mission experience and expertise in anthropology. We worked closely together to develop an anthropology degree that he started, and I took over that program. Marguerite Kraft was there when I was. She, Doug Hayward, and Sherwood Lingenfelter were part of my D.Miss committee. Tom Steffen was also there but taught mostly at the graduate level. I really appreciated his work on the facilitator era in missions, because it affirmed what had happened with the translation committee. Through Biola I also got involved with EMS. When meetings were held at Biola, Doug Pennoyer would let us have our own student section at EMS so that was fun. One of the best parts of Biola was being able to hire somebody like Kevin Pittle, who's just absolutely brilliant and then Katrina Green in development, so I think we've really had a very strong contingent of anthropologists there and really, I was hoping that we would make an impact on missiology by having really solid anthropology.

## **Anthony**

What were the faculty dynamics like? Were you friends? Did you spend time outside of Biola?

## **Sue**

David had worked at Biola about 25 years when we were married, so we had a variety of faculty friends. One story that he told me was that when his father died, the Lingenfelters invited him over their house for Christmas and other occasions. That was very meaningful to him, and they were the first ones he told he was going to ask me to marry him. I enjoyed mentoring new faculty. When my husband and I had date night, Katrina would often come along. Kevin Pittle became like a younger brother. I also did a lot with the other female faculty and staff on campus. I talked about 13 women into doing their first triathlon at Biola. I loved working on committees because I got to meet many interesting people outside my department.

## **Anthony**

Was Biola supportive of you going to UCLA and what was your reception like based on your background as a Bible translator going to a state university?

## **Sue**

I went to UCLA because the head of the program in Early Christianity, Dr. Bartchy, was one of the founding members of the Context Group, the group that started using anthropological models in New Testament studies. I had been critiquing some of their work because they often overextended the models in their analysis. When I wrote to him, he was on sabbatical, so my husband and I went to his house to find out more about the program. Dr. Bartchy was excited because he had a real anthropologist who was interested in this program. Most people came in with either a background in classics or the Bible, because it required both. I was deficient in the classics, so a lot of my coursework ended up being there.

Dr. Bartchy, the program director, was known throughout UCLA as being a Christian. Now he wouldn't fit into narrow evangelical boundaries, but he was definitely a follower of Christ, so with him it was never an issue. The first thing he did was sit me down and say, "You need to know where I'm coming from as a follower of Christ." It was fun to listen to him when he talked to students. He'd said, "Ok, these are the historic things



we can know factually.” People loved him and his classes were always full. I’d be in seminars with him, and there would be Hindus, Muslims, Catholics, and Evangelicals all reading Paul’s writings together.

I’m getting ahead. So, during the initial interview, Dr. Bartchy asks me to read an article he is working on and to tell him what I think. As I read it, I find he has overextended the model he is using. Now I am in a dilemma. Do I be nice or tell him what I really think? I thought if I’m going to get into the program, he ought to know what I really think so I told him what he was doing was interesting but that I would probably use this model in a more nuanced way. He actually replied that even if I didn’t get into the program, he’d love to work with me more on these issues. I got in.

It was a neat opportunity. I remember walking on the UCLA campus and had the sense that this is my new village. When talking to someone usually the first question people ask is, “What is your major.” When I told them I was studying Early Christianity often the reply was, “Well, I used to be a Christian.” That gave me opportunity to say, “Well, tell me about that.”

### **Anthony**

So then along the way you made the move to Asbury Seminary, who being a southern California girl who lived in Southeast Asia, now found yourself in horse country! I went to Southern Seminary in Louisville but took a PhD seminar at Asbury with George Hunter actually, so I did a semester at Asbury as well. Tell us a little bit about that transition. What brought you to Asbury and what was the reception like there?

### **Sue**

Well, my husband had just retired, and I had just finished at UCLA. So here we are, I’m done, he’s done. We were at this place that I thought we should listen to what the next thing was supposed to be and if it was Biola, I was very happy to stay at Biola. I prayerfully began looking and there were six missiology jobs open that year. Fuller, TEDS, DTS, Asbury, and so on. I kind of drew a line across the US and determined I wasn’t going any north of Tennessee. I mean, I’m a southern California girl, you know. But I felt like Asbury was close enough so we should look at them for various reasons. We came to Asbury on a visit and fell in love with the community. I laughed with people during my interviews. You don’t laugh at interviews, right? But there was a joy here that was attractive.

Another thing that drew me was the large community of international students. Because of my husband's health I can't travel much anymore. I had hoped to bring leaders from my SE Asian village to seminary to train and go back to their communities. I looked around and thought, here are the global leaders sitting in these classrooms!

But the thing that impressed me the most was the commitment to community. They sent me the faculty handbook and it described this beautiful faculty community covenant to each other. I just wept and I had to read it to my husband. We felt this call to the community. But we still weren't sure, so I made a list comparing Biola and Asbury. We wanted to seek first the Kingdom and it seemed like Asbury was the place. I remember completing the list and turning to my husband to show him. His only remark was, "It is about time you figured it out." He knew before I did that Asbury was where we were called.

### **Anthony**

Well, a lot of your background is coming together for me because I know you bought a house right there on campus because you want to have faculty and students over. I know you guys totally revamped that house at Asbury, which I love. So, you're plugged in. Wilmore, Kentucky is a small place, but that means everybody is right there. It's not Southern California, it's not urban, it's not Asia, but the community aspect of it is all you.

### **Sue**

We wanted to be close to that so David could age at home, and little did I know that with his recent spinal cord injury how we designed the house remodel is exactly what was needed now. Students who have independent study classes come to my house. Students come over to talk about their dissertations. I hold my office hours here and people just come on over!

### **Anthony**

You know when I do these interviews every year I'm always interested in the impact of professors on students' lives, and I can just imagine if I were to interview some of your students in 20 years how many of them would reflect fondly on time spent literally in your house! It's not often that students get to experience a holistic view of their professors, so that's really great.

We can start landing the plane here. So, I'm a runner myself. I did all different sports growing up, but I was roommates with some cross-country runners in college and saw a different side of distance running that became a beautiful thing to me. I started running later in college and actually was in a triathlon club. So, because of my background, I've followed your triathlon career with some interest from afar so how did you get into that?

### **Sue**

It was actually in SE Asia. There was a state team that trained and were encouraging people to do triathlons. They started holding workouts for people, so I joined in those when I was able. I did the training but never got to actually do a triathlon because that's when my mom got sick, and I was back in the states a lot. I was also getting older and didn't think it was a good idea to do a ton of training in one event like the marathon so triathlon spreads that out over three sports. I really got into it. I always wanted to do a full Ironman. On my first sabbatical I did a 1/2 Ironman. That's what they had in California. So, I did that three times, but when I moved to Kentucky, they had the full Ironman nearby in Louisville. Tris take a lot of time to train for but what was really cool was when we sat down at Asbury to look at my contract, we had 50% for teaching, and then 25% for research, and 25% for community service. My dean, Greg Okesson said let's count your triathlon as community outreach.

For various reasons I haven't finished a full Ironman. One time I crashed on the bike and there's been some issues with my knee on other occasions. The last time I did an Ironman, the organization asked me to tell my story. I said, well, this is my third attempt. They wanted to know how I deal with failure and why I keep going. It became a part of their media promotions. I'm in Ironman Facebook groups and get to talk about how I handle disappointment. It's been good.

This year, just with everything going on with my husband, I hired a coach because I couldn't emotionally do the kind of training I need to on my own. Having a coach who's writing the workouts and keeping track of my progress makes me keep the commitment. Sometimes you just need somebody else to come alongside you. So, that's this year. It's great that doing triathlons is part of my work here at Asbury.

### **Anthony**

Yeah, absolutely. Any other projects going on right now? What are some of your hopes and dreams for the next season of life?

## **Sue**

One of the things I love at Asbury is we teach a class called Missional Formation and get to teach pastors how to learn about their communities. So, I'm writing a handy little book based on that class teaching pastors how to do ethnography. It's a non-technical how to with plenty of examples. So, I want to finish that project. I'm in a weird place academically because so much involves caring for my husband right now. Emotionally, it's hard to be creative. I have another sabbatical coming up so what do I want to do? I think I'll finally write up my Acts lectures in a book called When Ducks Fly Upside Down. It's a joke that my nephew taught me that I used at the start of every Acts class. What happens when ducks fly upside down? They quack up. Everybody talks about the Kingdom of God being the upside-down Kingdom, but Dallas Willard talks about it being the right side up Kingdom and the problem is we've spent our whole life living upside down, quacking up. The Kingdom of God is about living in this new way and living right side up life. So anyway, I think my next project is to teach through what does it mean to be living a right side up life because so much of our discipleship today seems to be about me being a good person versus me being a relational person, a good neighbor.

## **Anthony**

Sue Russell, thank you for sharing a glimpse into all God's done in and through you. I've really enjoyed it!