

Loren Webb interviewing Pastor Alexander I. Wilkie
Pastor of Community Baptist Church
Interview on April 8, 2021

Webb: Tell us your first and last name and tell us . . .

Wilkie: Alexander I. Wilkie.

Webb: And the date and month and year it is?

Wilkie: April 8th, 2021.

Webb: Tell us where we're having this session, and what city is this.

Wilkie: In my home on April 8th, 2021.

Webb: In St. George, Utah.

Wilkie: St. George, right.

Webb: Where and when were you born, Alex?

Wilkie: I was born November 16th, 1929, in Holly, Colorado. And it was right on the Kansas border.

Webb: Tell us the names of your parents and names of any brothers and sisters.

Wilkie: The name of my father was Alexander Hamilton Wilkie, and my mother's name was Alma Ruth Vandike. They met in Colorado, Eastern Colorado. And from there I was conceived in 1929; and then I have a brother Robert who died a few years ago, who was born afterwards. It was about 13 months apart for each of us. And then was Robert, and then Archie. And Archie lives in Coos Bay, Oregon. And then Marlin, which was my brother, and he was killed during the Korean Conflict. A Japanese boat hit the big troop ship along with prisoners that were going back to Formosa. The Marines that were on board ship, they only found six bodies, and my brother was one of them. And then I had a sister that lived, and she died a few years ago, and her name was Agnes. And then I have a brother living still at Fruita by the name of James I. Wilkie, named after his grandfather.

Webb: Can you tell us a little about any highlights in your growing up years? Anything that stands out?

Wilkie: Well, I think one of the greatest highlights of growing up was growing up in eastern Colorado in Canon City area, the greater Canon City west cliff area, mountainous country, and my father built a log house that we lived in for a number of years until we

moved to Fruita in 1941 or '42. When the war started in '42, all of us were too young to go into the military. And during the World War II my brother Robert got into the military and was in Germany for a while, and he didn't have much to say about Germany. That was following World War II. And so that was a real highlight. And then when we moved to Fruita it happened to be hard work. I learned how as a boy to pick potatoes, thin sugar beets, pick tomatoes, and shuck corn and to feed the family and everything. So it was a lot of hard work. And might say thinning sugar beets is not the easiest thing in the world, sugar beet thinning.

Webb: No, it's not.

Wilkie: While I was in high school toward the end of World War II, I sat on a ditch bank, drainage ditch bank, watching a bunch of German soldiers that were prisoners of war in Fruita. They were thinning sugar beets. And it was my responsibility to go out and make sure they were getting those little sugar beets the same distance all the way apart. And my mother was, she was just sure one of those Germans was going to kill me. Never happened, and I got acquainted with a few of the Germans. I don't remember any of their names, but that was quite an experience.

Webb: Yeah, I've heard experiences like that. What is the name of the elementary, the middle school, or junior high or high school that you attended, and what was the location of those schools?

Wilkie: The first elementary school I went to was between Westcliffe and Canon City, and that one-room schoolhouse burned one summer, and so we had to move, the family moved down to go to Parkdale to the schoolhouse there, Colorado. That's just outside of Canon City, this way from it. And I went to school the rest of the grade school there. And when my folks moved to Fruita, or Grand Junction area, I finished up the seventh and eighth grade in what was called grade school. At that time if you went into the ninth grade you were in high school. So I went from the ninth through the twelfth grade and graduated from high school.

Webb: What year was that?

Wilkie: '44. And in '44 I went away to college that fall to Ottawa University, Ottawa, Kansas. I was going to go into the ministry at the time, and so I went to Ottawa, and I graduated four years later from Ottawa University with a degree, a bachelor of arts, major in biology and political science and history.

Webb: Okay. Can I just, I want to just go back, just briefly. Were there any experiences that you had in public school that you feel like helped shape your character or helped make you the kind of person you would become, prior to getting into college?

Wilkie: Well, I think one of the ministers, my first minister, I remember him. He was from, lived in Colorado, and was Clyde Shaftsall, and he would preach a sermon on the Book

of Ezekiel, 38th and 39th chapters. I still remember a few words that he said. But Clyde was real instrumental in getting me to go. But also Ottawa University also brought people out from there out to the Grand Junction area for church camping, helping out, and one of the men that I remember was Roger Frederickson, was a teacher, and he influenced anyone who wanted to go into the ministry to go to Ottawa. Now I finished up grade school and high school at Fruita, and then to college. And from college I went to Central Baptist Seminary from 1952 to 1957, studying for the ministry, with a degree in church history. A few years later in some of my travels going to England and Rome and Egypt and Austria I was then awarded by Central not just a Bachelor of Divinity but a Master of Divinity degree for the work that I've done. My thesis in graduate school was, "What Did Saint Augustine Contribute To Protestant Theology?" And my professor at the time, of church history, in seminary, said, "You go prove that." So he took me to the library at Central, and he pointed up to a row of books there, and I began to count them. There were 38 volumes in that row of books that Saint Augustine wrote. He said, You read all of them, then you've got to go over to the Catholic college in Kansas City, Kansas. And any books they have there on Augustine that you haven't read, you get them." I went to the Nazarene Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and did the same thing. And then he said, "Oh, but you're not off the hook yet. You've got to go up to the University of Kansas. Any book they have on Saint Augustine you haven't read, you've got to get. And so I read all of these here, and I wrote my thesis, and I turned it in, and I have to say that I'm really thankful when I turned in my thesis, what contribution Saint Augustine made to Protestant theology, the professor said, "Outside of the grammar, it's accepted word for word as you've written it." And I happened to know some of my own classmates had to do what? They had to rewrite their thesis two or three times over before it was accepted. So I thought that was a highlight of graduate school.

Webb: Yeah.

Wilkie: And then post-graduate studies in England, the great Canterbury Cathedral.

Webb: Oh, wow.

Wilkie: And I had stood at the high altar in the great church of Canterbury where the bishop of the church was executed at the high altar.

Webb: Was that the Church of England?

Wilkie: That was the Church of England.

Webb: Okay. I need to diverge, just want to diverge just for a minute, and we'll come back to the ministry. But in your social life, who did you marry, and when, where did you get married, and any children?

Wilkie: I was first married in Kansas City, Kansas, and I married my first wife, which was Marilyn Joyce Wilkie. That was her last name. And we had two children. We were in Magna living at the time.

Webb: And the names of the children?

Wilkie: Alexander I. Wilkie, Jr. and Marilyn Joyce Wilkie, just the two, a boy and a girl.

Webb: How did you meet your wife?

Wilkie: We met while I was in school, going to one of the churches.

Webb: And you met, did you say, was this in Kansas?

Wilkie: Married in Kansas.

Webb: In Ottawa?

Wilkie: No, at Central Seminary in Kansas City at the Grandview Baptist Church.

Webb: In Kansas City, Kansas?

Wilkie: Yes, Kansas City, Kansas. And then when my first wife was killed in Magna, we were driving a car from Magna out around the tailings dump of the Kennecott Copper Corporation, trying to do what? I wanted to get motion pictures of a molten slag being dumped out of the copper cars, slag, down the hill, and take a picture of it. Well, we didn't quite make it. The gal that was driving, the car that she was driving in, her and two soldiers were drunk. They slammed into my 1956 Buick, not Buick, but my 1956 Packard, put the left front wheel underneath the steering wheel. Her head hit the windshield, and she died in Salt Lake City. And I had my tongue about half cut off, and the doctor said you'd never talk plain. Well, my mother said, "Oh, yes, you will." And so she gave me stuff to put on my mouth, and then I chewed on my tongue where all those stitches that they put in my tongue, and they all disappeared. And then I went on in to graduate school.

[The following sentence was added at Rev. Wilkie's request: He married his second wife, Penelope Ann Hill in 1960 and they had one daughter, Lauren Kim Wilkie in 1962.]

Webb: Okay. So let's get back to talking about your post-graduate work at, was it Canterbury in England?

Wilkie: No. I went to Central Seminary in Kansas City, Kansas. But I was on a study tour just at Canterbury. I was on a study tour in St. Andrews Scotland. I was a study tour in Vienna, Austria. And my wife accompanied and we made six trips to Israel. And on one of those trips we were in Cairo. So after we got back here and were living here at home we took a trip to New Zealand and Australia and flew back home. But we both

have been to Hawaii. And I was out on the, very few people even know about the little island out there in the Pacific called Fanning Island. It's a little teeny island only about so big around. But if you wanted your passport stamped, you paid them to stamp your passport.

Webb: Let me ask you, did you get a masters or a doctorate in divinity?

Wilkie: No, I went back for the study for a doctor of divinity, but I have a master of divinity and a bachelor of divinity from my study work at Central. And then when I went back for the study was with McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. And I finally got, after a couple of years, I got tired of all of the baloney that they were passing out. They were not teaching the scriptures like they should have been.

Webb: So then occupation-wise, what was your first full-time job or vocation that led you to eventually become a pastor in a community Baptist church?

Wilkie: Well, one of the things—while I was in college, no, it was at Central Seminary, I worked for A & P Tea Company. At that time it was the largest grocery chain in the world.

Webb: You said A & P, right?

Wilkie: A & P Tea Company out of New York City. Well, they, A & P, got in a battle with the Arab nations, and they lost, so that was the end of A & P. And then when I was in college, also in seminary, I also worked in the seminary kitchen as a waiter.

Webb: So where did you get your first full-time job as a pastor or reverend?

Wilkie: My first full-time job as a pastor was at Magna, Utah. But previous to that I had been a pastor of a little church in Iowa, Leon, Iowa, when I was in graduate school.

Webb: How do you spell that?

Wilkie: Leon. It wasn't a very big community. And we got up there one morning, and I had to get up in Kansas City and drive to Leon every Sunday morning, because of things I was doing, working with A & P I had to drive up on Sunday mornings. We got to church one Sunday and there was nobody there. I wrote out a resignation and didn't go back. And then I finished at Central, and then after I got through with my graduate degree and graduated from Central I worked in the church in Kansas City, Missouri, as Christian Aid person for a year and a half or two, and then Roanoke after church. It was a dual aligned church, American and Southern. And then my first wife and I moved to Magna as a pastor. That was my first full-time pastorate. And it was in 1958.

Webb: Was that with the American or Southern Baptist?

Wilkie: American Baptist. The Southern Baptist was a church in Kansas City, Missouri. It just happened to be at the time I was there was a dual-aligned church. And I was ordained in that church. And then after Magna came St. George. And we moved down here in '61.

Webb: Do you remember what season—spring, summer, fall, winter?

Wilkie: It was in October of '61. In 1961 we moved down here to be the pastor of the church setting above the college, which is now called Red Mesa but was at that time a Community Baptist Church.

Webb: Was it known as Southern or American Baptist?

Wilkie: It was known as American Baptist Church.

Webb: How many members did you have at that time?

Wilkie: Oh, I think 75 was all. And then families began to complain, well he's not here to do anything. Well, during those same years that I was pastor, because of a growing family I had to have something for employment. So I went to work in the hospital.

Webb: At Dixie Medical Center, correct?

Wilkie: At the old Dixie Medical Center.

Webb: Were you with the Pioneer Memorial Hospital?

Wilkie: Yes, I worked in that one, the Dixie Pioneer Memorial Hospital.

Webb: You worked in maintenance, is that right?

Wilkie: You remember Karl Cottam?

Webb: Yes, I do.

Wilkie: Karl and I worked together in the Engineering Department. And every Monday morning Karl and I put on our coveralls and went down and cleaned the coal furnace. And we had to rod the tubes out with a wire brush. And when we came out we looked like we both had chains . . .

Webb: How long, you did that for a long time, right, working for the . . .?

Wilkie: I worked for the hospital for about 32 years.

Webb: Thirty-two years. So you saw it go from Pioneer Memorial Hospital to Dixie Medical Center to Dixie Regional Medical Center?

Wilkie: No, I didn't go on over to Dixie Regional. I was 71 or 72, I think it was 71½, and when I finally quit the hospital I was past 70 years of age when I retired.

Webb: What hours or days did you work there?

Wilkie: Mostly the day hours, because being the Engineering Department, when 5 o'clock came, the Engineering Department went home.

Webb: So then you did your after-hours with your congregation, is that right?

Wilkie: Right. I did the writing of the sermons and all of this, and in 1961 or that fall, the radio station asked me, you remember Ellen Winkelman?

Webb: Yes.

Wilkie: Winkelman asked me to come in and help do a radio program.

Webb: That was every Sunday, right?

Wilkie: It was five days a week. And we'd skip three weeks and then it would be five days.

Webb: You did that on KDXU 890 right?

Wilkie: That's right. And then the Miners bought it, and it went to just a Sunday morning radio program.

Webb: What did you call that program?

Wilkie: This is your Sunday Morning Radio Devotional. And it's still called that, and I'm still doing that.

Webb: How long was the session?

Wilkie: The first programs were 15 minutes. Now the program is 25 minutes. And when I go in to do the radio program today, or Tuesday morning, I got to go in and open up the computer, put in my own DVD, and set it to the number I need to do, and then read the scripture, have an opening prayer, play music, and then do my sermon.

Webb: I'll bet that was quite fulfilling. What did you . . .

Wilkie: That was hard work. But thank goodness I had a little bit of college training in college working in a radio station as an engineer.

Webb: What kind of feedback did you get from members of the public, as well as your congregation, of be . . .

Wilkie: Well, I don't get much back from congregation people because most of their services aren't . . .

Webb: But did you hear from the public?

Wilkie: I've done it for the public for years. And I might tell you that I have a lot of LDS people who wouldn't miss a program at all because I'm talking usually just about the *New Testament* part. Once in a while I'll go back to the *Old Testament* or the Psalms and do a message and such like that. And I'd try to do it as the year progresses along. Like I've just finished doing one for Easter Sunday a week after Easter because the one I did for Easter was a Palm Sunday message while everybody was at Church, and the program comes on at 9:05 on Sunday mornings, run for 25 minutes, and is followed by the LDS church program.

Webb: I want to have you describe for us a little bit about the church building itself. So can you describe the address? As I recall, it was something like . . .

Wilkie: It was at 95 South 800 East.

Webb: And then describe the square footage of the building and how many people did the main assembly hall hold?

Wilkie: There was just one assembly hall and a basement, and we had dinners downstairs when we had our church dinners.

Webb: So you had a kitchen downstairs?

Wilkie: Yes, the kitchen was downstairs.

Webb: Did you have any multi-purpose rooms or classrooms?

Wilkie: And we had a little classroom up on part of the building, and then while I was there we built a patio, and over the top of that patio became the next part of the building.

Webb: What was the seating capacity for the assembly hall?

Wilkie: It probably got up to around 200.

Webb: Okay, so it was a two-story building, and it pretty much stayed that way since then, even today, right?

Wilkie: Yes, it still is that way. They're talking about adding some more building to it. But the sign out in front, the first sign out in front, was by rock that we hauled in, and I can't remember his name, but he and I built the sign. We bought a frame and put it on. It was then known as Community Baptist Church.

Webb: Did you have adequate parking there?

Wilkie: Yes.

Webb: What are the basic beliefs or tenets of the church?

Wilkie: Well, one, we believe the *Bible* is the word of God. I didn't say any particular *Bible*. I know there are churches today that are saying, well, it has to be the NIV or the CEV or . . . and I always liked either King James or the American Standard version. I was always looking for the one that was as close as possible to what I remember reading in Greek when I was studying in graduate school.

Webb: What were your duties as pastor of the church? Were you called pastor or reverend or both?

Wilkie: Pastor. That was the general title. It was also listed as reverend. If you look in the telephone book it's always listed as Reverend Alex Wilkie. That's the way they find me.

Webb: Would you consider it to be a part-time or a full-time job.

Wilkie: Well, when I came down here it was full time. But they didn't pay that kind of wages. When I tried to get them to keep up with the wages, "Oh, you're getting the good wages, \$7,000 a year." And I thought \$7,000 a year doesn't even pay for it. And when I bought the home, the house payments were over \$200 a month plus taxes. So it's been a real struggle.

Webb: What were your main duties and responsibilities as pastor of the church?

Wilkie: Well, when I first came here I did a lot of weddings because it happened to be in California if you were 14 and 16, a boy and a girl wanted to get married in California, in Arizona, and Nevada, they had to have the judge's approval. But Utah only required a girl to be 14 and a boy to be 16. With parents' consent they could come to be married. And so the first while, the first years, I did a lot of weddings.

Webb: What else, what else besides weddings did you do? You gave your weekly sermon, right, at church?

Wilkie: Oh yes.

Webb: What was the church service, what was that outline?

Wilkie: The church service always had, whatever I was preaching, I tried to keep it to about 15 or 20 minutes. I always tried to stay to the theme. In other words, if you read Matthew 1 to 10, you don't jump all over the *Bible* to prove that. You stay with that particular text. And I'll see so many people jumping from one place to another to prove something, and I don't think that's right.

Webb: Did you have a regular amount of visitors that came to visit your church every Sunday, or was there a particular holidays when you'd see . . .

Wilkie: We had Sunday School and Church all the days I was there at the Church. And as I said, the preaching was a 15- or 20-minute radio program. We had Sunday School and we had our church dinners. Usually, most of the time, they were in the evening, never right after church, which we could bring, but if we had a pot luck we would bring it in, and everybody, we had tables and everything to set in, and all of that. So it was . . .

Webb: Where did your members come from? Where did the majority of your members come from?

Wilkie: A lot of the members came in by moving. If you remember back when they were building I-15, and the Air Force was setting up where?

Webb: Up on the black hill.

Wilkie: Up on the black hill.

Webb: I remember.

Wilkie: And with the Air Force up there, they brought in people. Major Zudma was the department head of the Air Force when they came in, and then he went to VietNam.

Webb: So did you see your membership increase when the Air Force moved in, up on the black hill?

Wilkie: Yes, it went up. And then when they started building the Interstate down through the Virgin River gorge, it went up, too.

Webb: Were people of other faiths welcome in your congregation?

Wilkie: Oh, yes. Quite often I had LDS people came in to the worship service. I didn't have to say, well, you got to be a member here to come. And I did baptismal services of different faiths because I was the only protestant pastor at the time.

Webb: What was that like?

Wilkie: It was kind of lonely, except for the Roman Catholic priests. And one of the years quite early in my ministry, I invited Roman Catholic priest to come and preach the Thanksgiving service in the church. And then guess what—he invited me to preach midnight mass in the little Catholic church that has long since been gone.

Webb: I remember that, too. Didn't it have a kind of like a green cover?

Wilkie: Yes.

Webb: A green roof?

Wilkie: Yes.

Webb: It's been gone for so long.

Wilkie: Yes. Anyway, he asked me to preach the midnight mass. But word got back that he hadn't asked the bishop's approval. So what happened to him? He got moved. And then when Father Kuzy came in, Father Kuzy and I did a lot of things together. Going to interfaith meetings that were probably the first interfaith before it was known as interfaith for your time. But we did these things together, and we went around to doing a lot.

Jesse Stocking: What year do you think that was, where those initial meetings happened with Father Kuzy?

Wilkie: I don't remember those years by number and such. But we did all of these things together, and then a few years ago the interfaith group had been going about 15 years.

Webb: So what was it like ministering in a community dominated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Wilkie: Well, I think that I tried to make it, I could accept you as people, will you accept me as a person that I am? And a lot of Latter-day Saints could do that. Some of them couldn't do that at all. But I think that was quite important that anybody coming in to the community who was not a member of any dominant faith group has to be able to accept them and get along with them.

Webb: During this time were you asked by representatives of other organizations such as clubs, other faiths, or even governmental bodies to serve in any community capacities?

Wilkie: Well, I served as a president of the Kiwanis Club here in town years ago. I ran to be governor of the Kiwanis Club and was beat out by one of the persons in Salt Lake City who was a Kiwanis.

Webb: Were you ever asked to give a prayer at, say, a St. George City Council meeting?

Wilkie: Oh, yes. I've been asked to give a number of prayers at the City Council. In fact, I even used five or six of them and since the County Commission does the same thing, I get asked to come every so often to give prayers for the County Commission. And a number of times I've been asked by the mortuaries, "Will you come and do a service and give a prayer?" or "Will you come and just give a prayer at the service?"

Webb: What does that feel like to you when you do that?

Wilkie: It doesn't bother me because I believe that if a person is a believer in God, their God is going to either reject them or save them.

Webb: How and when did you become affiliated with the St. George Interfaith Council?

Wilkie: Probably 14 or 20 years ago we started out in the group, and we met with Tim Martin and just a few churches, the Assemblies of God and the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church and Roman Catholic Church and then myself, because even though I had already retired from the regular ministry in '91, I was asked to be part of the group.

Webb: So you retired in '91 or '92?

Wilkie: And I've been busy ever since.

Webb: What made you decide to retire?

Wilkie: I think part of it was I was 70½ years of age, and I didn't plan on staying in the hospital any longer because they always said "where's Alex, where is he, we can't find him." And I would be . . . if I was out on the ground working, I was either sweeping the parking lots, keeping the parking lots clean, or helping plant flowers, or to do these things.

Webb: What was your greatest reward from serving as pastor of the Community Baptist Church?

Wilkie: I think the knowing that over the years they still recognize me as being a pastor, one of the pastors, of the Community Baptist Church, which they've had a number of them.

Webb: Can you clarify a little bit more about how you became a member of the Interfaith Council? How did that happen?

Wilkie: Well, I had been doing, for instance, on May 6th years ago when there was no Interfaith Council we always had a prayer at Worthen Park for May Day. And I asked people who were there to say a prayer for different persons, or they had a prayer. And that was our prayer. And we had a prayer down in the Worthen Park. And then the group

decided, and then we've got opening prayers at the Tabernacle on New Year's Day. And it used to be we were doing it when the Tabernacle was being redone, one day Monday morning came, or the Monday whatever day it was, came, and the City had forgot to turn off the water on that parking lot where the carousel is and all that. But it was still New Year's Day. And everybody, even the women complained how cold it was, and their feet were freezing off. The library was closed; we couldn't get in there to do it. And Dan McArthur said to the group, "I'll get you another place to have your prayers on New Year's Day. And so we moved to the Tabernacle. And then when the Tabernacle was closed, we just moved around.

Webb: He was the mayor at the time, mayor of St. George?

Wilkie: Yes, he was mayor for over 20 years.

Webb: You mentioned was it a Tim Martin, who was he affiliated with? Was he with one of the churches?

Wilkie: No, he is a Latter-day Saint. And he came from Virginia, and he spent most of his military career on a submarine under the water.

Webb: What was his connection to you with the Interfaith Council?

Wilkie: Well, we asked him to be the secretary.

Jesse Stocking: Loren, I can add to what you're asking there about Tim Martin. When he got to town, he had a church calling with the LDS church serving in the Southern Utah LDS Public Affairs Department. And that's where the Interfaith Council was initiated, and I know that was about 2009 when those talks were started. It may have been the year before, but talks were held, and they reached out to the entire community through the various pastors to invite as many leaders of all the faiths to come together for a meeting, and then I think it happened the following year, and the rest is history.

Wilkie: Then the group has also been involved, except for this year, of the Stations of the Cross walk down on Diagonal Street down to this street here, and then down over and closed at the Catholic church there above the Senior Citizens, over to the Catholic Church, and there was the closing part of the 14 stations of the Stations of the Cross march.

Webb: How long has that been a tradition in St. George?

Wilkie: That went for 14 years. This last year was our fourteenth or fifteenth year, and it was done inside the church by those that were invited because the church didn't want everybody to have a mask on.

Webb: Because of Covid?

Wilkie: Because of the virus. And the places in the church, and when our number came up, we read the prayer and the introduction and what station it was, and then the group read a part, and then we would have the closing prayer.

Webb: What experiences stand out in your life in connection with the Interfaith Council? In other words, is there anything that stands out as memorable and a positive faith that it's had?

Wilkie: I think there are about three of them. One of them is Stations of the Cross. The other is the New Year's Day prayer that takes place. And the other is the May Day festival that we've had, usually a breakfast. Now last year we didn't have a breakfast because, and this year we are not doing, didn't do a breakfast because the building we had been using on the college campus is also the same Sunday as graduation, so we can't use the College. So I don't know what we're going to be doing.

Jesse Stocking: There's another name for, I think . . .

Wilkie: And we've had the Interfaith Group has also done things in the fall for down at the Dixie Center.

Webb: So do you think this has been a positive effect for the community, doing these things?

Wilkie: I think what is going on in the community, the community is closer together than it was when I first came because when I first came, the Latter-day Saints didn't want anything to do with anybody else, whether you were Catholic or Protestant. They didn't want . . . and some of the others on the other side didn't want to have anything to do with the Latter-day Saints, either. And I think out of this and part of my ministry was to bring the groups so we could see that there was something important for each one of us.

Webb: What year was it you retired from the Community Baptist Church?

Wilkie: 1991.

Webb: In this day and age, where I think the Poynter Institute said that it's something like 47 percent of Americans are only involved with organized religion any more, what does that say to you as far as people caring about religion today, and is there something that . . .

Wilkie: I think that educational-wise, I think the liberal media, along with the influence of the Satanic effect upon education, grade school, high school, junior high, college, post-graduate, all want to get away from Christianity. And if we can—Satan is behind all of this because he wants to be the ruler of this world, not Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and was the Son of the Father wants to keep it. And I keep saying to people, one day you and I, we're going to look up into the clouds, if we're still alive, and what are we going to see? We're going to see Jesus coming in a cloud with all of the saints for

two thousand years back to earth, and we will have a new earth, and the Father and the Son, and we'll all be together. And those who didn't accept our Lord Jesus will go to be with Satan.

Webb: When you look back over your life, what lessons have you learned, and what advice would you like to share with others?

Wilkie: I would say hard work doesn't hurt anyone. Don't get your fingers so pretty that they don't get bent out of shape or a little dirty with working out in the soil and the dirt. And one of the great benefits is planting trees in the yard here, there was nothing when I moved, except a little hedge in the front. And I've planted all of the shrubs and trees in the thing, and if you'd have been here a month ago this magnolia tree was, had about a thousand blooms about the size of a saucer. The next one was a star magnolia, and it had a bloom about like that. That olive tree was planted, and it was the first one, and I have a little stump about that big around in that pile of stumps. And then about five years ago when we had that cold winter and they put sacks and things around the palm trees to save them, the olive tree died on top. I had to come in and cut off three great big stumps, and they ground them up, and from my trips to Israel I've discovered that as long as you keep the olive stump in the ground and keep it watered, it will produce a new shoot.

Webb: What other rewards do you see with working with the earth? I understand . . .

Wilkie: I think the reward is in the . . . up until the last two years of the garden is being able to grow enough food that we could freeze it and eat it ourselves and give it away to whoever needs it, when we've needed it.

Webb: I have a feeling that that's probably been a good feeling in your mind, because you're serving others, right?

Wilkie: Oh, yes. Well, serving others, but part of it, having grown up on a farm, my mom and dad, anybody came around, before they left the house, Mom always had something to give them. "You've got to take this home with you." Whether it was a dozen eggs or it was a piece of pork or a piece of beef or whatever it was, mother wanted to make sure they had something for when they got home. And I think the hard work of my folks influenced me to do these things. And then of course I wanted the landscape to be something that I remembered about the Midwest, of Kansas particularly, the magnolia trees, and over here, the tree that's in bloom right now I think is one of the prettiest trees in the community. When I put it in, Sylvan Graff said to me, "I don't think it'll live, but you can try it anyway." And there was an early spring, and it was too late for it to bloom. But the next year was a solid mass of white flowers.

Webb: Do your neighbors ask you for advice on gardening?

Wilkie: Oh, yes, they do.

Webb: Growing trees and that kind of thing? And is your . . .

Wilkie: And two of my neighbors, one of the neighbors lived down the house here, and then moved down here, has moved out towards Pioche, out on a farm. And they're having to build their own house again. They moved down into a home and then stayed there, and I didn't think they'd ever leave, but I helped train that one. And then the gal that lives on the corner just down the street here, on Diagonal, helped each one of them get started in gardening because both of them wanted to see what's in back of the house.

Webb: And I think you've shared some of the fruits of your garden with the Interfaith Council.

Wilkie: Oh, yes.

Webb: Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not asked you that you feel is important about what you've done with your life?

Wilkie: I would say this, I am happy that I stayed in St. George all of the years that I've been here. I have been in other places in the world, and I wouldn't trade it for any place in the world except maybe for the land of Israel. And when my first trip way back in '81 to Israel, had I been a teenager I probably would have never come home. I would have stayed and been a convert to Judaism, and so I know every year when my wife and I put out the Jewish flag, what in the world is that flag doing out there—are they Jewish? No, we're not Jewish, but we have a great love for the people of Israel. And I think that's what we do. And I get all kinds of, might I say to you another thing, don't ever make a donation to a Jewish fund unless you want to get all of the rest of them that they send out. I probably get at least a dozen different funds wanting me to contribute to them in Jewish things. And so my wife and I have decided because of our trips we contribute to the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and then I make a donation probably once a year to Ben-Gurion University out on the Negev.

Webb: So what is it that's so special about Israel?

Wilkie: Well, when you get to the land of Israel your heart is going to be touched in so many different ways. First of all because you have probably read the *New Testament* or even the *Old Testament*, and you're going to find that those ancient buildings still have meaning and purpose. The wall around the old City of Jerusalem is still there. Those olive trees that are growing down in the bottom of the Kidron Valley--they were probably good-sized trees when Jesus was born—are still alive. And to know that and the fellowship that you get, and I've had people say to me, "Are you Jewish? You walk and act like one." And I say, "No, I just have a great love for the Jewish people."

Webb: Jesse, do you have any questions for Reverend Wilkie?

Jesse Stocking: I was curious if you remembered what year you started doing the radio program?

Wilkie: My radio program?

Jesse Stocking: Yes.

Wilkie: It was in probably October or the first part of November of 1961.

Jesse Stocking: So when you first showed up in town, you started doing the radio?

Wilkie: Right afterward because the pastor who had left ahead of me had been doing this program with Ellen Winkelman, and at that time it was a week on, 15 minutes. And she meant 15 minutes. You ran over, you got cut off. It was Ellen Winkleman's way of doing it. And then the Miners bought it, and it became a weekly thing, 15 minutes on Sunday morning, and you better be on time, and you better get off on time.

Webb: And you've been doing it ever since?

Wilkie: I've been doing it, and finally after the Miners sold their station to Cherry Creek Radio they asked me to do a 25-minute program.

Webb: What year was that?

Wilkie: Oh, I can't remember—too many years ago to remember.

Webb: How long have you been doing a 25-minute program?

Wilkie: Probably 20 years. And I might say at the end of the 25-minute radio program they finally asked me to do that, and then the little boy that was, the young man that was helping me do, put me on the air and take me off and everything, moved to Oregon or Washington because he had something else he wanted to do, and he said to me, he asked, "What, now you got to come in and turn on the computer; you've got to set up what you put on, name the title, play your songs, you've got to do your songs yourself, not by my singing, but whoever I'm choosing to sing, on the DVDs, and put the number on, and tell them who it is, and then you have a prayer, and then you do the program and be off on time, and then guess what—you've got to record it. You've got to save that." And I enjoyed doing it. And one of my programs, I think it was a Palm Sunday program, I said to the radio engineer, I guess you'll just have to wait a couple of minutes before you can do your spots or your announcement because I ran over two minutes. And I tried to stay very close to the 25-minute radio program.

Webb: What about your family. How many grandchildren or great-grandchildren do you have?

Wilkie: I have three, four grandchildren, and one is a great grandchild, or maybe five.

Jesse Stocking: When you started saying prayers at the City Council or County Commission meetings, was that many, many years ago, or was that just in the past . . .

Wilkie: Oh, no, it was many years before we even had the Interfaith Council.

Jesse Stocking: So in the 1960s, maybe when you got to town, was that also happening?

Wilkie: Grey Larkin asked me to do some of the early prayers; they'd call and ask me, the secretary would call and ask me, "Are you free enough you could do a prayer?"

Webb: So Grey Larkin was Mayor of St. George at the time, right?

Wilkie: I don't know, it's been a long time ago.

Webb: Yes, he was.

Wilkie: Anyway, yes, Grey Larkin and Dan McArthur [a later Mayor of St. George], and every time I went to do the prayer, Dan wanted to know, "When did you come to St. George?" And Mayor Pike [a later Mayor of St. George] did the same thing. And Michelle Randall [a later Mayor of St. George], she was busy about, "We're going to get this meeting over with, and I don't care who's there." And Michelle would say, "Alex will stand up and give the prayer," and that's all she says. And then people would come in on the City Council, and on a lot of them, and I've been, uh, Mayor Brooks [a Mayor of St. George], and different people and such, and the Kiwanis, it was really a fun time at Kiwanis Club because we always hit the gavel with the Kiwanis Club, and I have one, you could always pound on the bell, "We're going to fine you fifteen cents or twenty cents."

Webb: Okay. Well, your last question?

Jesse Stocking: About the prayer over the City, can you talk a little bit about the prayer over the City part of the Interfaith Council and how that started?

Wilkie: Well, the first prayer over the City started up on the hill where the Dixie rock is. There is a gazebo there, and Pastor Jimmy Kasten was there, and he said the second year he was up there he asked me to come up and help with it. And we did it for a few years up on top of the hill there with the prayer over the city. And one morning it was so cold we, even with the fire burning, we were all cold. So we decided we would move downtown. The City Square had been built, and we'd do there until I mentioned when Dan McArthur found that we all had cold feet, so the prayer over the city has been going on ever since then. And the prayer was basically for the beauty and keeping the City what it really is, and I think that's important.

