The consistent revolutionary

Jim Graham talks to Shaun **Lambert** about what's sustained his half-century ministry

IM GRAHAM recently celebrated forty years of ministry at Gold Hill Baptist Church and 52 years in ministry altogether.

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He has been called one of
the fathers of the modern
charismatic renewal movement,
and has been a hugely influential figure in Baptist and wider ecumenical circles over the

He has never wavered in his

He has never wavered in his commitment to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

'I was baptised in the Holy Spirit in 1968, while I was still in Scotland,' he says. 'And the reason that happened to me was I'd almost given up on the ministry. I felt there was something more. To put it another way I felt there had to be something more. "I'd learnt how to do Church.

At the time I pastored the fourth largest Baptist church in Scotland. But there was an internal dissatisfaction, a longing, a yearning for something more.' His initial encounters with

people claiming to have been baptised in the Spirit alarmed him. Today many of the battles around the work of the Holy Spirit have been won, but these were heady, risky, dangerous waters to paddle in back in the

Jim had struggled with the issue for a couple of years prior to a breakthrough. People were warning him that if he got caught up in charismatic renewal it would spoil his

During a mid-week prayer time in the church hall in July 1968 Jim had an experience which he can only describe as 'Jesus coming in and touching my life in a new way'

'I had a sense of gratitude, I had a sense of wonder, I had a sense of warmth, I had a sense of longing, I had a sense of light, I'm talking rubbish to you now, words can't fully express

now, words can't runy express what was going on that night...I almost cried.'

This experience happened at the end of the prayer meeting and he went to his vestry and kneeling in front of his desk the encounter with God continued.

After a couple of hours he slowly walked home through the public park.
'I don't know if you know Robinson's hymn, 'Heaven above is softer blue, earth around, is evented agreen?' around is sweeter green?'
That's how I felt. I felt a
oneness with God's creation.'
Jim also found out later that

mid-week evening in July 1968 was also the time Gold Hill decided to call him as its pastor.

It was at Gold Hill that his opportunity came to test the waters. He began by sharing his personal testimony at a church

weekend away.

'I suppose I expected a reaction, but there was nothing. Not - 'that was interesting', or 'that was deeply disturbing'... nothing. So I raised it with the elders and they began to encourage me to teach about it.'

The congregation over a long period of time moved from aving the gifts of the Spirit



forbidden to accepted, from accepted to encouraged, and from encouraged to affirmed.

It was not all plain sailing, and Jim acknowledges that the first ten years in the church were very difficult. For any minister starting out, or experiencing difficult times, Jim's ministry is a testimony of perseverance and grace in leadership, as well as being prepared to put one's ministry

and reputation on the line.

Jim was keen to pass on the blessing and helped Gold Hill become a resource church for other local churches. 'What drove me in those

days was to find out what the beating heart of New Testament Christianity was. One of the ways I tried to do that was to expose the congregation to what God was doing elsewhere.'

This included an understanding of the wider theology in which the person

and work of the Holy Spirit was

rooted.
'I became convinced, and I now am rooted in this, that we must come to Pentecost by way of Calvary, by way of the Cross. And this leads to an understanding of the Kingdom, of which charismatic renewal is a prerequisite.'

At the heart of what has sustained Jim over the last 40 years is his love for and

rootedness in God's Word.

'There have been many who have encouraged me. But there are those who have despised me. Doors have been closed to me. My commitment to Jesus, Jesus' people and the Word of God has kept me going – not success, because there has been success and failure along the user'.

because there has been success and failure along the way."

The story of growth at Gold Hill over his 27 years as the senior pastor has been documented in some of his books. When he arrived the church had about 120 members.

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When he moved into a full-time wider ministry 13 years ago there were between 650 and 700 members. More than 2000 leaders had come on conferences at Gold Hill.

Nearly 30 members had gone out into local church ministry during that time, and at one point during that period 52 missionaries were supported by the church.

There are many gems of distilled wisdom that he dispenses naturally as we talk. A surrendered life is another secret

of his durability.
'I get my sense of significance and self-worth from surrender to him, to Jesus, I can truly say I have never felt more spiritually alive than now.'

For the last 13 years he

has tried to develop a more contemplative prayer life, which began with a visit to Brother Ramon, the former Baptist minister who became a Franciscan hermit at

believes that many churches today have the theology of renewal but not the experience. For him theology without experience is dead, and experience without theology is

experience without theology is dangerous.

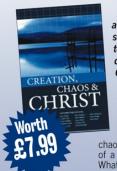
If he had the opportunity to start over he would still try to forcefully advance the kingdom of God, but he would give more time for change to occur, he would give more opportunity for feedback, he would encourage more leaders to lead, and on a personal note he would spend more time in contemplative

Although not a revolutionary or a radical by nature, he has been that throughout his ministry - the consistent revolutionary who lasted the

The Revd Shaun Lambert is pastor of Stanmore Baptist Church, Middlesex

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