

Hickman, Franklin Simpson ^[1]

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by [C. Sylvester Green](#) ^[2], 1988

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Franklin Simpson Hickman, minister, author, and educator, was born in Fort Wayne, Ind., the son of John Wesley and Emma Tessier Hickman. His early education was sporadic and was not completed until he had worked for eight years (1903–11) for the Pennsylvania Railroad. When he felt called to the ministry in 1911, he finished his high school studies and enrolled in De Pauw University, Greencastle, Ind., in 1913, the same year he was ordained a [Methodist](#) ^[3] minister. In 1917 he was graduated at age thirty-one with a B.A. degree and then spent three years in graduate study at Boston University, earning the bachelor of sacred theology degree (equivalent to a current bachelor of divinity) in 1920.

After his ordination Hickman served in various local church assignments, but focused his objectives on teaching. To that end, he accepted a position as instructor in the Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions from 1920 to 1924. Simultaneously, he was enrolled in Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., from which he received an M.A. degree in 1922 and a Ph.D. degree in 1924, with a major in the psychology of religion. De Pauw University awarded him the honorary doctor of divinity degree in June 1950.

For the session 1924–25, Hickman was associate professor of religion at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minn. Continuing his preaching ministry, he was pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Minneapolis and director of the Wesley Foundation (student work) in St. Paul from 1925 to 1927. In the summer of 1925, he taught at Emory University, Atlanta, Ga., and the following year the Abingdon Press published his authoritative *Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*.

His addresses before many church gatherings and his scholarship attracted the attention of the administration of [Duke University](#) ^[4], Durham, which in 1927 appointed him professor of the psychology of religion in the newly formed School of Religion (now Duke Divinity School), an affiliation that continued until his retirement in 1953. For a number of years Hickman also taught homiletics and continuously served on major academic committees of the faculty. He taught at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va., in the summer of 1928 and spent the spring semester of 1937 on sabbatical teaching at Soochow (China) University. In the summer of 1941 he was guest teacher at Iliff School of Theology.

Hickman's fame as a preacher found expression at Duke through his ministry as preacher to the university (1927–45) and as dean of the chapel (1939–48). He held the added title of professor of preaching in 1939–41. During those years he was in great demand as a speaker on campuses, before church conferences, and in the pulpits of many denominations.

In addition to teaching and preaching, Hickman was an avid reader and researcher, and he wrote extensively. Following his 1926 text on the psychology of religion, he published *Can Religion Be Taught, Evangelical Religion Faces the Question?* ^[5] (1929), which was an outgrowth of an address he delivered before the Methodist Sunday School Council in Nashville, Tenn., on 28 Dec. 1928. He was a contributor to *Education and Religion*, edited by Homer Henkel Sherman (1929). *Christian Vocation—A Study in Religious Experience* ^[6] (1930) was the script of the Belk Lectures (second series) delivered at Wesleyan College, Macon, Ga., in April 1930. He was also the author of *The Possible Self—A Study in Religious Education as Adaptation* ^[7] (1933), *A Child in the Midst of Democracy* ^[8] (1934), and *Signs of Promise* (1943). His last volume was *Religion Tomorrow*, comprising the Norton Lectures delivered at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., in 1940 and the Mendenhall Lectures delivered at De Pauw University in 1942. In 1947 he wrote "Wings for the Spirit—The Spiritual Message of First Corinthians" for the *Upper Room Bible Series*.

Through the years Hickman was contributing editor of *The Christian Advocate* and frequently wrote articles for many church publications. He contributed several meditations for *Holidays and Holy Days* (1946), edited by H. E. Spence. His most extensive writing project was a daily devotional article, "Just a Minute," begun in 1944 and published continuously for more than twenty years on the editorial page of the *Durham Morning Herald* and the Augusta, Ga., *Herald*, a feature read daily by more than 150,000 people.

He was a member of the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal church, a frequent delegate to the Federal Council of Churches and the major conferences of the Methodist church (he was once nominated to the office of bishop), and the founder (1931) and longtime director of the Phillips Brooks Club, an interdenominational gathering of clergymen at Duke University. His fraternities included Phi Beta Kappa (scholarship), Delta Sigma Rho, Phi Delta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa (leadership), and Theta Phi (theology). Travel was a lifetime hobby, and he visited many parts of Britain, the Near East, Europe, and Alaska.

On 28 June 1913 Hickman married [Veva Beatrice Castell](#) ^[9] of Angola, Ind.; they had one child, Anna Jeannette, who died in infancy. Upon his retirement from Duke, the Hickmans established residence in Angola, Ind., and spent four months of each year in Deland, Fla. He died and was buried in Angola.

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