

... And Spreading the flame

. . . And spreading the flame

Sharing thoughts gathered from a lifetime of adventuring into
the heart, blessings and ways of our loving God

John Beaumont

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PASSING ON THE TORCH – THE FLAME OF GOD

A good friend recently described me as ‘in the twilight of my life’ graciously adding ‘in humble, joyful, celebration of Jesus.’ So perhaps it is time for me to share with you things that continue to burn in my heart. Of course I’m only in the twilight of my *earth life*. By the end of this year [2012] I’ll either be 80 years old or enjoying *heaven’s full life!*

I have no desire to ‘pass on the baton’ - which could indicate others running around the same track that I [and others like me] have already trod. My desire for the coming generation is that they adventure into whole new dimensions of God’s matchless love and amazing grace as He fulfils the desire of His heart for His people – whom He loves so passionately.

I implore you, face the challenge of going well beyond where I, and others of my generation, have ever gone! Isn’t that in God’s heart for today?

The flame of God’s passionate love for us all, and the flame of His intense desire for precious lost people stand out as eternal beacons of divine mercy. Mankind desperately need to experience the wonderful salvation He has provided at immense cost. Oh the indescribable wonder and hope of glory of which we may have a sweet, precious foretaste here and now. It is *Christ in us!* We are being transformed into His likeness by the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. This needs to become a hallmark of our daily lives, yours and mine.

In our younger days we used to talk about someone being “On fire for God.” How precious is that inner flame! It’s not a fire of frenzied activity, or of an inner urgency to study and learn. We were

talking about Holy Spirit fire within us as we aligned our life, love, thoughts and desires with His.

It refers to a flame of devotion and a flame of compassion within us, lit by the Holy Spirit Himself, and kept burning brightly by our love walk with the Lord Jesus. It is also about wholehearted, even radical, surrender of all we have and are, and all we ever hoped to have or be – for God to use or not use just as He pleased.

Speaking about someone ‘on fire’ was often followed by reference to a ‘soul winners fire,’ referring to a love for lost people in need of Salvation. Today I still ask, “Where’s the fire?” I see many good things, but where’s the fire to ‘consume the sacrifice?’ Just the other day a friend chatted with me about the fire I had way back then. Truth is, it still burns within me and you don’t have to dig much before you become aware of the flame!

God, please send the fire of your love to each of us! God, please send the Holy Spirit’s fire into our very beings, for Jesus sake and for the sake of a lost and dying world!

As a young man I determined by the grace of God to walk in spiritual ‘freshness’ all the days of my life. I loathe the thought of becoming stale and dry and just ‘matter of fact’ in my love walk with Jesus. Freshness - great way to go!

Before I visited Sweden on one occasion a brother in England prayed that I would feel the way God does about Sweden. Quite a prayer! While in that country I certainly felt a deep, loving compassion for everyone I saw or had contact with. That love was mixed with a yearning for everyone there to find God for themselves, plus a sense of

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sorrow, or concern, that so many there, as throughout the whole wide world, seemed to live as though God doesn't exist – simply ignoring Him. Oh my! How God loves you and me, and every precious person alive.

It may be easy to ignore a baton, but hopefully it's a whole lot more difficult to overlook a fire, a flaming torch!

DIVINE PRIORITY

Let's not hold on to our own priorities of Christian relationships, activities, styles of gathering, forms of leadership and structure, but open our hearts wide for whatever is on God's own heart for us here and now.

Above all else God's message to us today is, as it has always has been, firstly "I love you..." and then secondly "share My love, share My life..."

The message and call of the Lord Jesus is first of all to enjoy His close, intimate fellowship. Personally I am totally convinced that an on-going intimate love relationship with our precious Lord Jesus is the only adequate motivation for consistency over the years of our Christian life!

Love God with *all* your heart, mind, strength... this must continually have utmost priority in our life. Let's *always* love Him like that! Never forget He loves us with a passion greater than we can even grasp! Let's never forget either, that God *is* Love, holy, compassionate love!

Do you ever try to describe God's love in non-biblical, non-churchy, non-theological terms, in both words and action? What about starting with paraphrasing John 3.16 in your way of speaking? It's good to be able to speak about Him in that kind of way.

Discover in practical terms how you can 'love your neighbour [in the same manner - Wuest] as yourself.' This must also have priority in our lives. Jesus told us to love others as He loves us. The bar can't be lifted higher than that!

Loving God *and* loving our neighbour cannot be separated from each other.

FOCUSSED SIMPLICITY

In a generation of high educational standards, amazing technology and brilliant discoveries, life can become extremely competitive, demanding, busy, and bewilderingly complicated. In spite of that I am fully persuaded that [for example] even an illiterate, primitive villager in a remote, far-flung corner of the globe can be enabled by divine grace to live a victorious, meaningful and God glorifying Christian life. We don't get to heaven 'head first' and neither do we experience deeply satisfying and heart pulsating shared life with Jesus going at it 'head first.' In God's Kingdom it's always heart first. Any other way, we are bound to fall *headlong*, aren't we?

More than ever there's a need to return to the 'simplicity that there is in Jesus.' As Father's much loved children we are able to freely nestle into His loving arms and trust Him to show us the way forward –

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one step, one day at a time. This leads us to the challenge, call, and command to ‘take up our cross daily and follow Christ.’

To understand what *your* cross is, look to Calvary! Only a totally self-crucified, Christ magnifying life style can allow God to fulfil His highest purposes in our lives. *No* cross, *no* resurrection life and power – it is as simple as that! Think about this challenge as it’s depicted in 2 Corinthians 2.14 – 16:

“But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death, to the other the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?”

Can you see this Scripture is about the fragrant aroma of Christ emanating out from each Christ-filled believer, in one way to those being saved, and in another way to those being lost? In no way should it ever be thought to refer to the nasty stink of decaying flesh!

Firstly, to those being saved, the aroma is the fragrance that is found in cross-bearers, of ‘death to self’ and sin. It is evident and manifest in the life of even the simplest Christ-follower who is totally yielded to God and whose sole desire is to please their precious Lord, without a personal agenda and without selfish desires. Surely we all know or have known folk with such loving, Christ honouring and Spirit filled lives which have been really appealing, inspiring, encouraging and challenging. We have sensed the fragrance of Christ in them and longed for the same to be true in us as well.

To those who are perishing – those in our family, school, work place, and neighbourhood who do not know the Saviour *yet* - the aroma is the fragrance of being fully alive in Jesus. How can we be ‘Misery Mikes’ or ‘sad Sacks’ when we are enjoying an on-going, wondrous life-link with the glorious One whose magnificent love is so freely showered upon us... in every situation, every day! A person not yet saved may consider us quite strange and even a bit weird, but if our lives are ‘hid with Christ in God’ then surely they will still get whiffs of the aroma of Christ – and find it strangely appealing.

Maybe this could be a test of the genuineness of self crucified living: Who gets the credit for good things God does in and for each of us or where we have been a conduit for the flow of His life and love to others? Do we acknowledge that these things only happen to us, in and through us because of God’s love, mercy, and grace, and that the praise all belongs to Him?

‘Credit’ involves attention and praise. We give God credit for something when we praise Him for it. Are we quick to say, “I prayed for you,” drawing attention to ourselves as if we deserve a bit of the credit? The meritorious cause of a blessing is not your prayer – or mine – but solely God’s love and mercy. Likewise, do we give credit to our faith for something occurring, when it was only the *faithful One* who brought it about?

HEARING GOD

Thank God He chooses to reveal Himself, His heart and mind, to us. If He didn’t we’d be in a hopelessly, totally helpless and lost situation, floundering around in the morass of our own thought

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processes and useless endeavours. Because of His tender mercy and lovingkindness, even a child can hear Him clearly and understand what God is saying to them. In fact, children and new believers often hear God better than those of us whose Christian walk may have become complicated by the human, reasoned 'teaching' we have received.

Our priority must always be to love God with every fibre of our being. The *next* priority for us is to be hearing Him, and *the third* is experiencing the Holy Spirit's leading and anointing day by day.

CLEAR HEARING

How can we be sure that what we sense in our inner being is truly the 'voice' of the Holy Spirit? The glad reality is that because of God's mercy and grace the Holy Spirit lives within our spirit.

Here are Bible references which I believe give clear insight into how the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits initially that we are God's children [Romans 8.16] and then continuing on in each step of a believers life:

1. Philippians 4.7 states: "The peace of God ... will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." See that? It is a precious privilege for every Christian to live with the peace of God in our hearts. The peace of God will *protect* us from missing the mark in understanding what is right and true.
2. Colossians 3.15 tells us to allow the peace of God to rule in our lives. That is, we are to recognize the peace of God, which protects our

hearts and minds, is a referee, arbitrator, and decider of what is really the way for us to take, one step at the time.

3. "Whether you turn to the right hand or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" Isaiah 30.21. Isn't that good? If we turn away from the right path in any way, our peace will be disturbed with an inner sense of unease. Turn back to the right path again and peace will once more flood our hearts.

If anyone tells us something that they have truly heard from God the indwelling Spirit will confirm it with the endorsement of His peace. If we do not have peace on an issue, then it is not right – or at least not right for us.

LOVING [an on-going intimate love relationship with Jesus] and HEARING, plus whole-hearted RESPONDING sort out everything else, don't they?

Love hears even a whisper... that kind of intimate closeness does!

An example of these three things sorting out everything else is in the way a pastor in upstate New York told me he knew I would never tell his people to leave their church. However, he maintained that because I teach them to have an intimate love relationship with the Lord Jesus, and also to respond wholeheartedly to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the result is just the same. Some had been led to leave!

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How do we respond to God? I am profoundly grateful for the time in my life when I became aware that surrendering my life to Him involved saying one big “Yes!” to Him. From then on the issue has been not whether I understand, whether it is obviously beneficial, whether it is bound to be acceptable, whether it has been proven elsewhere, or even whether I like it and want to do it – or not. From then on the issue is clear and simple: Is it God, or is it not? If it is God then I have already said, “Yes!” to Him, to cover every issue as long as I live.

Some believers seem to be able to live so that their life is marked by ‘obvious love.’ In the 1950s I had the privilege of fellowship with Dr Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision. His capacity to love God and others touched me profoundly and challenged me deeply. It was God’s kind of obvious love.

Perhaps we should be challenged to think: “God is love and He lives within me,” so, in what measure can it be said, “John [or your name] is love?” God is holy love! His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit!! Help me Jesus!

HOW WE HEAR GOD

I advise friends to treasure quietness, silence even, and to enjoy times of quiet alone-ness in their every day life. It’s a fertile situation to chat with Him - hearing His inner voice and responding from the heart.

Isn’t it somewhat artificial to hear God in gatherings, and expect to do so, if not hearing Him clearly in the norm of life – our daily lives?

If you share something you believe you’ve heard from God, why not also share how you heard it? This may help others to recognize His voice as the Holy Spirit gives them an inner witness to its authenticity. Sharing *how* we hear well may help newer and younger believers to trust what they hear as they realize that they are already hearing like that.

Do you have a Broadband connection with the God of heaven and earth, not the old ‘dial up’ kind that is only used when *you* want to communicate? It’s ever so important to keep an ‘open line’ between you and the Lord, always eagerly aware of any prompting you receive from Him, and knowing that a loving Father hears every sigh and desire of our hearts.

Part of clearly hearing God and knowing His will for our lives involves being pre-determined to joyfully accept whatever He chooses. His choice is always exactly right for us. So we don’t need to ask “Why?” or “How,” but be careful to do the right thing of *His* choice, at the right time, and in the right way. In the past, saying or doing the right thing in the wrong spirit and with the wrong attitude has caused untold havoc and hurt among God’s people.

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Actually, I seldom use words like ‘pray’ and ‘prayer’ because for too many folk it has a religious connotation of needing to talk to God in a special way and often at special times and in special places. God is the great heart-reader, heart-hearer, so I would rather just chat with Him and gladly have Him read my inner desires and longings. Mind you, if I feel like asking God for something for me I usually just

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mention it and leave it in His hands. He is such a loving, caring Father and knows my every need. After all, we are special to Him, you and I.

Still, I'd like to shed a little light for those who say, "I Have difficulty with my prayer life." Years ago a friend asked me what was different in my prayer life of late. I answered, "I think I speak to God much more like He speaks to me," that is very different from any public prayer we are ever likely to hear. God speaks to my inner heart with thoughts, impressions, and persuasions. Can I speak to Him like that? Of course!

What is God like in our eyes? This can make a huge difference to our communication. Listen friend, God is *not* remote, but always near at hand. He is wonderfully forgiving and immensely, intensely loving. Far from being reluctant, He is eager to shower blessing upon us and to satisfy every need. And, of course *He is abundantly able to do all that His love and wisdom see is really best for us.*

It is very important to see that we cannot consider 'prayer' in isolation. James 5.16 tells us that, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." This indicates that the kind of person we are in God's eyes has a bearing on the result of a request.

There is no 'magic formula' to getting response from God, but there are life style pre-requisites, or keys. Here is a list:

1. Live in a close and loving relationship with the One who loves you ever so much. This enables you to be in agreement with the heart of God. Be convinced that God is lovingly eager to give what is truly best for your life.

2. Discover how easy it is to trust Him as you magnify Him in your heart and mind. That is, have an attitude of trust – faith – in God all through your life, but don't try to measure or even think about your faith. He is absolutely reliable, and faithful, so fix your mind and heart on Him the trustworthy One.
3. Align yourself with His desires. Want what He wants, *always*. More than that, *love what He loves*, always. A wise friend wrote to me, "The idea of walking in step with Jesus and praying to be in agreement with the heart of God..." needs to be a central concept in our thoughts about prayer. How true! We cannot pray effectively if we aren't keeping in step with Him.
4. Grow accustomed to hearing God in your daily life. Be eagerly sensitive to the Holy Spirit's witness within you.
5. Learn to leave matters on God's 'plate' that is, in His hands. Wouldn't it be sad to have a begging bowl complex – 'give me, give me, give me'? I seldom ask God for anything – mostly just praise Him for all His kindness and love.

Please take note carefully that it is impossible to trust God for what is outside the will God. We may be able to pray outside of God's highest will – may even do so quite frequently, wanting what we want – but it is impossible to trust – exercise faith – outside His will. It is our faith that God responds to, rather than our prayer. God responds to faith, not faithless prayer. It's easier to pray than trust. I've sometimes joked that maybe God receives a ton of prayer for every ounce of faith, but there's a sombre thought behind the joke, isn't there?

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IDEAS NEEDING A RE-THINK

Someone told me once, “God has *got* to answer our prayer. We’ve had so many praying for us.” No way! That’s like saying, “Listen Lord, your servant speaketh!!” Is it any better to expect God to answer prayer because ‘two or three agree on what we want? Scarcely! ‘Agree’ in the verse referred to means harmonize, that is, be in total heart agreement. Ever hear a choir and/or orchestra all sing the ‘top line’ of the music? Of course not, but that is what simply agreeing on one point is like.

Some refer to having spent hours in prayer, having ‘prayed hard,’ or having fasted, almost as if it is a way to force God’s hand. [I wonder if such folk know the difference between a fast and a hunger strike!] Pray how you like and how long you like, but God will only read your heart and respond to your faith.

You can see that our motives, our heart towards God and our continuing trust in Him are paramount to effective communication with Him. Do we remind Him of a promise and ‘claim it’ because we have confidence in Him, or to try and ‘force His hand?’ I wonder.

Do we use “In Jesus’ name” as a magic key to guaranteed success? ‘In Jesus’ name’ is not primarily an authority idea at all. It means praying in His place, on His behalf, for what He would ask for if He were ‘in our shoes’. It is asking for what He wants. ‘In Jesus name’ does *not* mean using those words. No way!

Something else that needs a re-think, but which I grew up with is, “God always answers prayer – Yes, no or wait.” That sounds like a

‘cop out’ to me, or maybe a divine lottery. It seems to mean you’ll never know why God doesn’t respond to a request, but if we receive no answer the blame is His, not ours! Surely it runs contrary to some of the lovely things Jesus taught about prayer.

God *always* honours what He has told us, and the promises He has given. If a response is not apparent there is obviously a misunderstanding on our part, not His. In such a case why not humbly ask Him for insight, understanding and revelation of exactly what His will is in that one issue, and in all of life?

We can learn much from Jesus praying in Gethsemane. He naturally longed to avoid the immeasurable pain of bearing our sin at Calvary, but the crux of the matter was that He only wanted what His Father wanted – at any cost. How wise the attitude, ‘I only want what God wants, and *I don’t want anything that He doesn’t want.*’

A VITAL CONNECTION

Is what I have written thus far practical as well as vital for each of us? Count on it my brother! Count on it my sister! I ask this question because I have a friend who has told me time and again that what I share may be well and good but it is of higher concern to him to *see* and know what God is doing in His church and in His kingdom on earth. He wants it to be visible. I say: “Thank God it’s not!” If it were, well meaning men and women would seek to lead and control what God is doing. That would ruin the lovely, sacred things God is even now doing in the hearts of His people on earth today.

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You see, the condition of your heart and mine before God is directly linked to the state of the church Jesus said *He* would build. The fact is it is being built in the hearts of His beloved people, who *are* the church. We will never see with the natural eye what God is accomplishing by the Spirit in the spirit realm. And what God is doing even now is glorious!

What I have just shared may be a parallel to the Scripture that speaks about what God has prepared for His people. It's true that no eye has seen, ear has heard or mind understood what God has prepared for us, but the Apostle Paul continued, "But He has revealed them unto us by His Spirit." Think about that!

WORTHWHILE LIVING

It's great to enjoy happy and loving family lives, to find satisfaction in whatever our occupation may be, and to value social activity like leisure time with friends and involvement in healthy sports. However in the midst of daily interests and activities we dare not lose sight of the spiritual dimension of God filled, God controlled lives.

Life worth living includes maintaining a sense of eternity and the spiritual dimension of life, rather than being 'worldly minded,' - that is - allowing earth things to occupy our minds virtually all day long, and night too. To what extent ought we to live as misfits in an alien world, not settling down comfortably here, dominated by the present? Some believers are content as long as they are part of what they consider a 'good' church with a good pastor. A satisfying [perhaps even radical] *church* life style may be pleasing and fulfilling to some, but I'd rather give priority to a radical *personal* and *community* life style!!

I believe there should be a redemptive quality to everything we do, and to every relationship - loving lost people and giving them glimpses of our precious Lord Jesus! Precious lost people need to hear of salvation in Jesus and catch glimpses of Him in ordinary people. Let's care deeply about those in spiritual peril! Let's live love on earth as Christ's representatives right where we live study and work.

Want to be like Jesus? Rather than hankering for the cloister of a 'church' circle to foster that desire, aim to be *a friend of sinners* - friendly, natural, approachable especially to unsaved family members, to school mates and to work associates, alert to share Jesus and give Him the credit for good things in your life.

I am reminding myself again that friends of sinners, who are concerned for the lost, are wise to frequently have prayer thoughts such as, "Help that person to find you, Lord," after being in conversation with an unbeliever. The same thought may apply to any person who catches our attention for a moment or two, sometimes simply because we pass them in the street. I may also mention another prayer thought that is precious: "I am so glad you are here, Jesus."

There is no need to prove others wrong - especially unbelievers - but there is a crying need to let them know that *Jesus is right for all that is wrong in your life.*

It is always a challenge to "Practice the presence of Christ," but doing so as much as possible certainly helps us maintain a God-awareness in daily 'secular' settings.

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Many years ago I visited Dhonavur in South India where missionary Amy Carmichael had set up loving family homes to raise girls who had been rescued from temple prostitution, an iniquitous aspect of the Hindu religion. Every hour on the hour a clock in the centre of the village struck the time.

When the clock struck, everyone paused for a moment to whisper to the Lord, something like: "Glad you're here Jesus. Thanks for your love. I love you." It seemed that all through each hour I was among people who were aware of God's presence with them. They were 'practicing the Presence.' I had never experienced anything like it. It was a foretaste of heaven!

OTHER PRACTICAL POINTERS

My very precious brother, sister, it is perfectly fine to be 'laid back,' but where's the fire? of love for God? ... of compassion for the lost? Where's the anointing? [Have you read my article 'Anointed living – anointed ministry'? It is freely available] *Refuse* to drift along. Nothing ever drifts upward. Because it is very important in my life, let me mention again that over most of my lifetime I've repeatedly reminded myself, and now and again mentioned to God as well, that my heart is set on living in perpetual spiritual freshness every day of my life. Why not??

You ask about prayer and how to engage with God? Make chatting with Him, as a member of *your* family the main basis of your communication with Him, remembering that He is with us and in us, as well as exalted in the heavens. Don't forget to be a very thankful

member of *His* family. Bathe in His love. Enjoy His presence. Marvel at His grace toward you!

I have found that it can be very counter-productive to focus much thought or even prayer on personal needs of any kind – just hand them to Jesus and leave them 'on His plate.' Filling one's mind with concerns about oneself, or anything else about ourselves, isn't really helpful is it?

My experience is that it is much better *not* to focus on, emphasize, talk about or even think about such things as modes, styles, fads, structures, worship patterns, belonging here or there, teaching, doctrine, leaders and the like.

Life is found, rather, in a focus and emphasis on a continuing intimate love relationship with Jesus, encouraging it in others. Blessing abounds where we are hearing and responding to the Holy Spirit who indwells us and is 'Lord of the harvest.' Freshness, enthusiasm (enthuse = God breathed), Spirit-inspired spontaneity, and excellence are all worth our lingering thoughts, focus and emphasis.

Healthy family life is of great value, in the natural and in the spiritual realm. If Jesus is your Lord, you are my brother, my sister. Never forget that church is 'family' not an organization, nor army.

MOVING ON

Here are things that may help you to *return to the simplicity that there is in Jesus*, and thus move on in your life of adventure with God.

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Don't ape, copy, imitate, or needlessly repeat what others have said. Sameness has a 'man made' stamp on it. In God there is infinite variety. Sameness leads to staleness, which leads into a rut that has the smell of death about it!

It is much wiser to *focus* on and *emphasize* [1] an on-going intimate love relationship with Jesus, encouraging it in others; [2] hearing and responding to the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and is 'Lord of the harvest;' and [3] on freshness, enthusiasm (enthus: God breathed,) Spirit inspired spontaneity, and excellence; [4] on healthy family life in both natural and spiritual realms. If Jesus is your Lord you are my brother, my sister. Never forget the church is 'family' not an organization, nor an army.

Exercise wholehearted, prompt obedience to God and leave what happens subsequently in His hands. An American Christian TV programme that screens in New Zealand usually ends with: "*Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him!*" I love that! It is surely a challenging path to walk and a way of high adventure. At the same time it will bring glory to God and allow Him to accomplish more through each one of us than would otherwise be possible. This kind of obedience may be very challenging, but I am convinced it brings great rewards for God's glory. He underwrites our responses to the Holy Spirit.

SCRIPTURES RIGHTFUL PLACE

In my early teens I learned about the Holy Bible that: 'Whatever is vital is clear; whatever is not clear is not vital.' That is still a wise guide today! It is most important for us to live out what we *already know* of God's plan for us, rather than endlessly seeking for further

biblical insights. I mean, don't we live in a day where huge numbers of believers are master theoreticians of Bible truth? Our heads are crammed with it.

I hope you can hear my heart. Listen, dear one: There is far more Bible teaching, Bible knowledge and books about The Book in this generation than any other time in church history. Beyond that there are more meetings, more churches, more preachers and preaching, more Christian endeavour in our day than there has ever been before. *If* these things held the key for ushering in God's Kingdom it would have been done by now! We had surely better find a higher way!

In the past fierce division, endless strife and numerous wars have come about through diverse interpretations of Scripture. Christians say they "Stand on the word of God," but *they actually only stand on a fallible human interpretation of it.*

One time when we were staying with friends in Richmond, Virginia, USA, our host asked me to lead a group in their home one evening, because he'd been called away. They were using one of my books as a basis for discussion and study. When someone asked for clarification at one point I explained what I had meant. Another lady - who had no idea that I had written the book - contradicted me by declaring, "*This is what the writer meant....*" I didn't bother to tell her that I had written the book.

Since we believe the Author of Scripture is with us, how much more important is it to allow Him to interpret it to us? Get the message? I believe there is far more value in being a proclaimer, than

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being an explainer. Priority in teaching and explaining should always be given to the Holy Spirit - God Himself—the author of the Book!

WISE USE OF THE SPECIAL BOOK

When asked what I would advise a new convert as far as the Bible is concerned, I have replied: I'd urge them to read the Bible copiously, initially just enjoying reading it, and subsequently searching the Book for unchanging *eternal principles*, taking a broad view of what God is revealing. I'd encourage them to avoid 'jot and tittle' study/knowledge.

I would recommend that at least for many months they don't look to anyone to tell them what Scripture means, but rather to be asking God Himself to explain it to them. Then, I'd suggest that when some statement, verse or chapter seems particularly precious and applicable to them they should think about trying to commit it to memory. We should search the book for ourselves, letting the Holy Spirit interpret it for us, rather than looking to books, TV, videos, preachers and the like.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

As you read the sacred Scriptures I urge that first of all you set out to discover everything you can about God Himself: the basic *unchanging principles of the nature of God*. Learn about Him in His intrinsic Being – His very nature - in every record you find that gives a fresh or deeper insight into His great heart of love. Above all else, God is love, holy love. Never forget it! Keep notes of your discoveries and read

them over from time to time, adding in any new discoveries you may have. This kind of quest opens up a treasure chest of spiritual gems.

Secondly, I would urge that you revel in another Bible principle, which goes beyond the nature of God, and reaches out to discover all you can about the *eternal purposes of God*, His thoughts, plans and purposes - Discover! Especially as relates to you personally, the neighbourhood where you live, and as relates to His family as well. In reaching out to grasp the first principle you will doubtless have been amazed by the awesome majesty and glory of the Almighty, and also with His tender heart of love and care. Now in this principle you must surely virtually stagger at the wonder of our great God's purposes for the universe, for all mankind, for His big family, and for you and me.

The third principle in this 'triple cord that cannot be broken' relates to *the activity of God* - Not only historically, but also in and for you and the church that is His family, which right now He is redeeming, creating, building. He has wondrously high purposes for your life and mine and is dynamically active in bringing about His grand design.

The three basic eternal principles I have just detailed should be enough to satisfy anyone throughout a lifetime of Bible reading and study of all that is vital for life and godliness. It should keep them from majoring on minor matters and save them from the kind of far-stretched interpretations of Scripture that are rampant among Christians today.

I do not know how to emphasise sufficiently, that the very nature of God Himself is reflected . . .

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[1] *In the main thrust of Scripture*

[2] *In His purposes for His people, and all mankind,
and*

[3] *Is expressed through His activities.*

Everything God does is because of who and what He is. He always acts in accordance with His nature.

WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Please don't skip this segment. It is probably different from what many have been taught and believe, and yet well may resonate in your heart.

In Hebrews 4.12 Living Bible we read: "Whatever God says is living power" [*not* whatever God said.] The Amplified Bible puts it: "The word that God speaks is alive and full of power..." In Psalm 119 Wherever 'word' is found, *The Message* translation uses the term: 'revelatory word.' In Matthew 4.4 NIV we read 'Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" All of these references indicate that the word of God is not primarily what He has said and revealed in the past. They are in the present tense, referring to what He says and is saying here and now.'

God did not stop speaking when the canon of Scripture was completed. Scripture sets out essential principles necessary for godly

living and is vitally important. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we become very sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit who dwells within our spirits.

We should expect to hear from God in our daily lives, not primarily through Scripture, but by an impression of the Holy Spirit within us. [Relax friend, you may be very sure that the Holy Spirit will never contradict Scripture though He may cut across faulty interpretation of it.] Ultimately, whatever we read in Scripture, whatever others share with us, and whatever circumstances we may point to, are all only God's *now* word to us at a particular moment if the Holy Spirit gives an internal 'amen' to it.

Personally I don't refer to the Holy Bible as "The word of God," let alone "Word of God," since too many believers think that it is either the only way, or at least the main way that God speaks today. I don't believe such an attitude can be justified.

In England one time a denominational leader told me that he was going "to stand on the Word of God," meaning Holy Scripture, "and not listen to and walk in the Spirit." What an astounding, arrogant statement! My reply: "You just do that, then you'll never come to NZ!" When he asked what I meant I simply pointed out that New Zealand isn't mentioned in the Bible. Think about that!

Believe it or not, for practical purposes some honest, earnest believers, and Christian leaders, virtually deify the Holy Bible by their beliefs, attitudes and actions. Like the church leader in England, they believe in Father, Son and Holy Scriptures. That is heresy!

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ENCOURAGING EAGER CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

Too often when a senior believer is in contact with an earnest, eager believer they want to ‘take them under their wing’ to provide the teaching they feel is needed by such people. Rather, we should send, or better still take them to the Source of all life and understanding! The Holy Spirit is Teacher, Encourager and Leader supreme.

Why not show other believers where there are green pastures. Rather than force-feeding them with fist-fulls of grass you’ve gathered from those pastures, encourage them to seek God for themselves. Warmly invite them to spend time with you and other kindred spirits - and so assimilate your life in the Spirit. But more importantly by far, urge them to spend time alone with their Lord, finding out for themselves what God’s will for their life is.

Make clear that the Christian walk is not a life of form, patterns and accepting what appeals to the natural man. Let each one discover for themselves God’s approving ‘amen’ in the heart, and follow that. Hear God for yourself! This inner ‘voice’ of the Holy Spirit is our divinely provided *Global Positioning Device*. Scripture may be our road map, but we vitally need Holy Spirit directions for daily walk, and for every activity!

Everything of value in Christian life flows from a quality relationship with God! So let’s never forget it!

An old-timer once said, “When I sought faith, faith fled. When I sought God, I found faith.” *Faith is a relationship!* Don’t seek gifts, only the Giver. Place little value on your faith, but honour the faithful One – trust the totally *trustworthy One*.

Faith in an eminently faithful God may be described as relying, depending, reckoning, counting on 100%, relaxing in His faithfulness, and ‘leaning on Jesus.’ Determine to ‘stake your life’ on who God is and what He says!

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY LIFE

All who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation are members of God’s wonderful family. We are spiritually linked with one another whether we meet together in special gatherings or not. It is wise and valuable, whenever we spend a little time with another believer to remember that our precious Lord is right with us there and then – as indeed He is. So it should be natural to share together in some way about His love, what we are hearing from Him, and ways He is leading us. Just socialising as non-believers do, solely at a natural level, is depriving one another of the life and encouragement we can share. Please don’t be content with that!

When guests dine with Mary and me, we expect to partake of spiritual as well as natural food. This makes an ordinary meal into a delicious ‘Love feast’. I often sort myself out ahead of time with a question to ask or something fresh on my own ‘spiritual plate’ to share. I feel confident that when Jesus said, “Do this to remember Me,” He was not only referring to Calvary – the past – but ‘*right here and now*’ I am with you to nourish you with My life. Please remember *this*.’ Strange

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isn't it, to only remember the past of someone Who is currently with us!
And He is divine love!

As followers of God who *is* love, we are challenged to love as He does! Here is John 13.35 in the Wuest translation: "A commandment, a new one, I am giving you, that you should be constantly loving one another with a divine and self-sacrificial love; even as I loved you, you also be loving one another. In this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you constantly have love among one another."

What a challenge to every child of God! '*Constantly*' takes Christian love to a whole new dimension, doesn't it? So does "Even as I have loved you."

LIFE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

A missionary in Africa, seeking to translate the word 'eternity' into a local language was advised and inspired to use the term 'life without boundaries.' I love that, and refuse to tolerate manmade church or fellowship boundaries around me. When we meet with a few Christian friends – or a larger number - let's stay open for others to be there. Surely that could include anyone who does not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour *yet*.

Since we are trusting the Holy Spirit to lead each of us in our own lives, there well may be times He will want us to share what we've heard from Him with others. At times we would gain by allowing and even inviting someone else to share 'manna' that they have freshly received.

Don't look around you at what others are doing, to find the community life style that appeals to you. Since you are learning to hear the Holy Spirit clearly and to following Him wholeheartedly, then that kind of hearing and responding can carry over to community life. History shows that external forms, patterns, and leadership structures linger long after the fire has gone out. Perhaps they help actually to extinguish the flame.

In the Welsh Revival Evan Roberts urged believers to 'tarry' in meetings until the fire fell. A friend in New Zealand has told us of the tedious, lengthy meetings she endured in earlier days because their church leaders felt that tarrying was the key to revival, though of course it isn't, and revival did not come. Nevertheless we all do well to maintain an inner prayer desire for revival fires to erupt all around us.

On the other hand a theology lecturer in New Zealand told me of Evan Roberts teaching a seminar at the Theological College he attended in England. Roberts told them, "Linger where the Spirit hovers." Now *that* is something we all do well to learn and follow! It is well worth thinking through.

Of course we should not underestimate or overlook the social aspects and needs of Christian living, but at the same time not shrink from God-sent aloneness, which is very different from loneliness that could merely be an expression of self-pity.

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BRINGING ABOUT COMMUNITIES

It seems to me that community is best facilitated by living the way we feel is right for us as individuals, being hospitable, friendly, loving to neighbours and open to share what we are hearing from God for ourselves. In other words, not seeking to create community but sharing ourselves with others in the measure that we [and they] are comfortable with. Of course we dare not overlook the challenge and blessing of being friends of sinners by being friendly, thoughtful and kind.

From time to time we have heard someone complain that others aren't friendly enough. The key in this situation is not to seek friendship and kindness, but simply set out to give it. Why not trust the Lord to bring about the friendships and kind of fellowship with believers that is ideal for you and your family? There is rest in leaving the matter in His capable hands.

It is valuable, if people are being invited to come together, that there is always a specific purpose to it that we or someone else has heard from God. Non-specific, almost automatic repetitions of any kind of gathering can quickly lead to them becoming draining, binding, boring and mostly unprofitable - deadly, even!

I am a great believer in seasons. A season has both a beginning and an ending. Religiosity and Church-dom find it very easy to start a new activity, but usually finds it very difficult to know when a season is over, and close it down.

An illustration of what I mean by seasons could be telling others that during the next three months of winter we are having an

'open home' on Saturday evenings where everybody is welcome for a bring-and-share meal and then mostly singing our love to Jesus around a warm welcoming fire.

Another illustration of seasons could be seeing if someone else would like others to join together at their home once a week for, say, the next month, for a welcoming 'cuppa' and sharing with one another what we have been hearing from the Lord and what we feel is our prime field of responsibility in the Gospel - as far as our own neighbourhood is concerned. It's challenging to ask oneself, "How can I be Jesus" [His representative] in my street, workplace, and so on.

Possibilities are endless. If we have a heart for it surely we'll hear God on it.

ELDERS AND MINISTRY GIFTS

From time to time I have been asked about apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor teachers. My desire is that God would raise up these functions in such a way that they bring glory to the Lord but are scarcely noticed by others. After all, these people are not meant to act like officers in the military, senior management staff in the world of commerce or to hold some kind of controlling status in any kind of organization.

I don't like the way some folk talk about headship as if such people are 'heavies' on the church scene. What we should all aspire to is *a-headship*. That is, people who move on ahead in some aspect of their walk with the Lord. Were I to see someone who has a special capacity to effectively share the good news of Jesus with work mates,

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people who live near them and so on, I'd want to learn how I may excel in that field also, wouldn't you?

If I saw someone who stays calm under provocation and shows kindness to awkward, mean or nasty folk I would want to learn from them – not the theory of mood adjustment, but how to find grace from God in that kind of situation, wouldn't you? Get the picture? Anyone who walks 'humbly with their God' beyond where I am walking in some aspect of life at the moment, is ahead of me, and is someone whose lead I will want to follow in that aspect of their life.

Jesus Himself made very clear that every function in the body of Christ is a servant role, primarily as servants of God, but with a loving, humble servant-like attitude to all. We should not do anything simply because it fits into what we or others perceive our function to be, but primarily out of clear heart witness of the Holy Spirit. That is, we should not attempt to function in a ministry gift of any kind, but simply love God with our whole heart, and be increasingly sensitive to the inner 'voice' of the Holy Spirit, responding with prompt whole-hearted obedience. This makes every individual gifting unique.

WE ARE *ALL* SERVANTS

At a gathering of Christian leaders in Cape Town I realized that they were trying to discern whether I was a prophet, apostle or who knows what. I gladly told them I had simply come to be sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit, "call it what ministry gift you like, I'm simply a servant of Jesus!"

Beyond every function being a servant role, the major distinctive of every gift should be in expressing divine love with Christ-like humility and grace. No matter how outstanding a person's words and actions are if their lives and what they say and do are not loving and gracious, they are 'out of order'.

The functioning of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers are very important for the life of the Body, but those people are wise who simply leave to God the issue of how, where and when He raises them up, equips them and leads them to a servant role marked by pure love, humility, maturity and simplicity. God intends to use each of us for a unique purpose in the church and in the world, and He will do so as we keep our eyes on Him and respond to His every call. Officialdom would destroy any hope of these ministry gifts functioning anywhere near what is right and best.

Don't recognize somebody as having a particular function because of his or her actions, abilities or desires, which may simply be of a natural origin. Remember that basically Scripture describes the *qualities* of an elder, not his duties! When God ordains a function for a person it is on the basis of character, devotion and experience with a proven capacity to be sensitively hearing and following Holy Spirit directions. You see, revelation of the mind of the Lord should be accompanied by revelation of His loving heart.

Let me emphasise again that every function in the Body of Christ is a servant role and needs to continually demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit. Besides this, it is well worth remembering that no ministry calling, gifting or spiritual function of any kind is automatically for life. It seldom is.

WHAT ABOUT BIBLE TEACHERS?

Jesus taught for a practical, active response. He said, “He who *does* these sayings of Mine...” It was teaching ‘to do,’ not just to have depth of understanding about as some folk seek in teaching. I’ve known some with an almost freakish knowledge of Scripture whose lives in no way ‘adorned the doctrine.’ Intellectual knowledge that has no effect on the way we live is of little value at all.

Many a time we have heard some leader or other described as a ‘great Bible teacher.’ ‘Bible teaching’ is not a Bible term! You can find no reference to Bible teachers in the Scripture. You see, we are encouraged to teach truth, to teach life, and above all, to teach Christ. The cry in the heart of a ‘well born’ convert is ‘Tell me more about Jesus.’ Even a person who has walked with the Lord Jesus over many years will have the same desire.

Didn’t Jesus say that the time was coming when we would need nobody to teach us, other than the Holy Spirit? If that doesn’t refer to here and now, then tell me when? Accordingly, it is wise to simply and clearly state truth, allowing the Holy Spirit to apply it. It is far better to *proclaim* rather than tediously *explain* and apply. Isn’t that the Holy Spirit’s ministry?

OTHER GIFTS

I don’t feel comfortable with someone saying, or having said about them, something like “he has a gift of healing,” or whatever. I have no gifts as such, but simply trust God to give me whatever gift He

wants me to receive from Him and pass on - whether it’s healing, wisdom, encouragement, discernment or whatever. For that matter I find little joy in being described as an apostle, prophet, or anything else other than a simple lover, servant, child of the living God. In very truth I am simply a love servant of the Lord Jesus, just seeking to respond to His every desire.

At a leaders’ meeting in the USA on one occasion, each one was asked to state who they were and what their role was. When I said, “I am John Beaumont. I am a worshipper of the most high God,” everyone roared with laughter! Shame on them.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit frequently function better in the norm of life, than in special gatherings and maybe even better when the channel is unaware that what is said or done is a gift of the Spirit in operation. *Only* accept that a prophetic utterance is valid for you when it warms your heart and God gives you the inner ‘amen’ of His endorsement.

My observation is that one-man leadership quickly becomes a bottleneck to blessing and sooner or later causes stress and grief, whether an ‘officially’ appointed leader, or not. Groups should *not* meet in the home of the ‘strongest’ most vocal or senior person, but a weaker one, or the stronger person will likely become an undeclared one-man leadership. Many years ago several groups/ ‘churches’ asked me, “Will you exercise apostolic oversight over us?” My reply would be, “if God wants it, but never exclusively.” We must all be open to people gifts wherever they come from, just as long as we have clear inner witness they are God sent.

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We have noticed that groups/ fellowships/ house churches and the like will very likely be or become little different and scarcely better than the more formal church 'thing' people have come from.

FINAL COMMENTS

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." - Not just leaders, missionaries, seniors, and special people!

'Fellowship' in this verse is Koinonia meaning: shared life, partnership, things held in common. What an amazing connection between every believer who reaches out for that kind of fellowship, and the wonderful Holy Spirit of God. It is vitally important for God's purposes to be accomplished in and through us that we grasp, enter into, and live in the 3-fold reality of this verse. [2 Corinthians 13.14]

I enjoy reading of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' in one passage of Scripture. It reminds me that *God is one God*. Too often modern teaching and theology dissect and divide Him up far too much. We are not accepting Jesus wholeheartedly if we place restrictions on the Holy Spirit. We are not honouring our heavenly Father if we seldom think, talk and share about Jesus and His blood-bought salvation. God is one God. Think about that!

To every friend, every reader: I love you! God loves you! Go for the best! *Never* be satisfied with second best. Early in my life I was blessed and privileged to taste heaven's best. It spoiled me from ever being satisfied with man's best.

All of life is an adventure. Enjoy it! Keep in mind that 'Life on earth is very brief, like the falling of a leaf;' a thought that emphasises to us that we are to live much more in the spiritual realm of life, keeping heaven in view. To God be all the glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, to the ages of ages.

Now to Him who is able to keep *you* from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only wise God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

See you in heaven. Enjoy the journey!

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