

Revelatory Adventure

*Prophetic understanding of what it means
to walk in the blessing and the fullness of
God's grace, free from man-made rules
and traditions*

John Beaumont

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Foreword

Do you desire to see the Lord Jesus revealed on this earth in the fullness of His glory so that all the world cannot but acknowledge Him?

Do you long to see His Body respond freely and fully to His promptings?

Do you yearn for His love to touch those who do not yet know Him?

Do you desire to see an end to the staleness that comes from man-centered activity in the church?

Do you, personally, wish to walk before the Lord in a way that satisfies both Him and you, free from man's expectations and the dulling effect of religious activity?

If so, this book will make your heart sing!

Here John Beaumont examines many aspects of today's church life and how they stifle the pure expression of the Spirit by substituting man's activity for the work of the Holy Spirit. He shares practical steps by which our lives can be transformed from fruitless activity to fruitful simplicity in a full response to the Spirit. At the heart of this message is a call to the people of God to be radically obedient to His voice in every area of their lives, thus becoming a true expression of His will being done "on earth as it is in heaven."

We have been privileged to know John and Mary Beaumont over a period of more than eleven years. We deeply respect their walk of joyful obedience before the Lord. John often mentions his desire to be hidden so the Lord may be more clearly seen and heard. We testify that his life and ministry have consistently pointed us to Jesus Himself.

As you read this book, listen to the Spirit and look to Jesus to speak to your heart. Beyond forming an opinion about the details, seek to experience His desire to be glorified in a free people who fully trust in His all-sufficient grace.

David and Nina Rice Dublin, Ireland

Preface

Earnest believers everywhere have a desire for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. To that end we should appreciate any steps our precious Lord Jesus takes in bringing the people of God to the place where He may present a radiant Church as His bride.

We have no right to be skeptical of, nor to fear, any new way the great Head of the Church may choose to lead any portion of His flock. Don't we urgently and immediately need the fresh light and flowing life of God to flood us all? What we currently understand and experience is insufficient for Father's highest purposes.

However, we should carefully weigh what we hear or read on these bases:

1. Is it scriptural?
2. Does it healthily emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ as Lord?
3. Does the Holy Spirit assure us in our innermost being that those concerned have heard and responded to His voice?

Ezekiel saw a cloud fill the Temple and the court full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. David wrote, "Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame" (Ps. 34:5).

It is my earnest aspiration that this book will turn hearts to the Lord Jesus in such a way that He alone will be the great attraction of their lives; only then will each one gladly and unreservedly follow wherever He leads. May the temple that we are become radiant with the glory of the Lord!

Let me make this clear: I share nothing in this book from any sense of superiority. Like you, I am at best a limited and imperfect person. It is not my intention to cause anyone to think he must do things "my way." We all need to be discovering His way and walking hi that!

Any kind of division in Father's wonderful family distresses me. It grieves Hun as well! I gladly extend a hand of warm brotherly love to anyone who loves the Lord with his whole heart, whether we have identical or diverse viewpoints and emphases, whether or not we are involved in similar practices or activities. Thankfully, I lead no movement and control no person or group. It is a high privilege simply to serve the Lord and His people.

John Beaumont

CHAPTER ONE

The Ultimate Place of Blessing

What could be more pleasing to the Lord than for every one of His children to enjoy an overcoming life in exactly the place and condition He chooses for them? What could be more satisfying to each of us than to know that at the present time we are fully responding to the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is reigning in our lives to such an extent that He is being wonderfully glorified in us and we are recipients of His choicest blessing? Need it be an idle dream to think that we can actually live like that?

Is it impossible that in our day the Church of God could truly radiate with heaven's quality of love and pulsate with divine power? Is there an ongoing experience of Christ's overcoming life available for us now so that we can walk in the Spirit in amazing freedom and rest, simplicity and effectiveness, Christ-like fruitfulness and triumph?

Can we walk totally free from the traditions through which men have made church life artificial, irrelevant and very burdensome? Through that can we become a vital, clear, living testimony to the world that knowing Jesus Christ as Lord brings radiant transformation to every part of life, wonderfully honoring Him? Can we enjoy such fullness of divine grace that heaven's light, life and love flood our lives and overflow in such measure that literally multitudes of needy, thirsty, lost people eagerly and gratefully drink to the full of the water of life?

Can Christ's Kingdom come in our day? Can His will be done on earth as it is in heaven? Can He present to Himself in this generation a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless? Can we live such holy and godly lives that we speed the coming of the day of God?

My heart says yes! So, I truly believe, does the heart of the Lord! Does yours?

Friend, can we at least be enthusiastic enough, unprejudiced enough, radical enough and self-crucified enough to attempt to discover the next steps Father has for us in our own lives? Yes, this can be a most amazing day of clear divine revelation, of mighty Holy Spirit outpouring and of amazing adventuring into the virgin territory of God's further wonderful objectives for His people on earth today.

Perhaps best of all, there should be no doubt that whatever stirrings rise up within us through questions such as these, this is God's day for those who honestly recognize that they are insignificant, imperfect, very unworthy and in constant need of God's supernatural provision of wisdom, strength and personal revelation of His will.

Joseph in Egypt

If and when this generation is written about from a historical perspective, the term best used to describe the Church may well be transition. We are not what we used to be, but nothing like what we are intended to be and, by God's grace, will be. There is an awful amount of tension, criticism and division over the issue of the need, pace and direction of change. Because this is a time of transition, we should hold lightly even to things that are meaningful, relevant and precious to us now, gladly releasing whatever is necessary for us to fully respond to the further revelation the Spirit gives us of the way forward.

In the Book of Genesis, Egypt is described as a special place, the place of God's choosing for Joseph at that time. We read that God was with him there, showed him kindness and granted him favor. More than that, the Lord was with him and gave him success in all that he did. The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered. (See Genesis 41ff.)

Even Pharaoh perceived that the Spirit of God was upon Joseph; therefore he trusted him with responsibility for the future of the land. Egypt was where Joseph's brothers bowed before him, fulfilling the dream of his youth.

Joseph considered that he was twice fruitful in Egypt, and that God had sent him there to save lives by a great deliverance. He acknowledged to his brothers, "God has made me lord of all Egypt." Joseph charged his brothers to tell his father about the entire honor accorded him in Egypt.

God spoke to Jacob in a vision, saying, "I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again." In Egypt the Israelites acquired property, were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

So God was with Joseph in Egypt. For him it was a place of blessing, favor, salvation, deliverance, honor and fruitfulness.

They Stayed Too Long!

From the perspective of Exodus chapter one, the Israelites must have looked back on what has been described, and yearned for the good old days.

How tragically different things had become! Egypt was now a place of bondage. The people were no longer free. They had no choice but to obey the orders of their rulers and do whatever was commanded them.

Egypt had become a place of ceaseless, mindless toil. The Israelites were cruelly oppressed and ruthlessly forced to labor long hours making bricks for the unending building programs their masters' grasping ambitions demanded.

More than that, the Egyptians feared the Israelites would become too numerous and join their enemies against them. To deal with this supposed danger, the midwives were ordered to kill all baby boys born to the Israelites. What a threat new life can be!

How can we explain the difference between Egypt as God's choice place of blessing and fruitfulness, and the place it became of bondage, suffering and apparent hopelessness?

The Israelites stayed there too long! All along God had reminded His people that He had a better place for them. How faithful the Holy Spirit is to prod us again and again, seeking to awaken us to Father's call to move on, causing us to become dissatisfied where once we felt completely fulfilled.

Jesus: The Sole Source of Life

The means or channel of blessing can gradually come to be seen as its source. Egypt was never the provider of abundance. Only God is that! We should see scant merit in the form we use in worship, no matter how free and flowing it may seem. When we do see importance in the way we worship, we have probably lost our understanding of what worship is!

We should claim little virtue in the form of leadership we feel is correct, or in special teachings that we feel have been revealed to us. We should not become proud because we are related to men in ministry who are known and respected very widely, nor of the fact that they may have led us beyond where the more staid seem to be stuck. Belonging to what seems to us very important and grand is doubtless an indication of danger, rather than of God's favor.

Our focus should be Jesus alone! At best these other things are merely channels for God's grace. Our boast must be in the Lord Himself. How wisely the Scripture enjoins us to delight ourselves in the Lord in such a way and to such an extent that when He gives us the desires of our hearts, our delight is still in Him alone. Whether we have an abundance or we suffer lack, there is continuing contentment for us when walking step by step with Jesus is a precious reality. He is our life; He is our joy!

When we place inordinate value on form, pattern, people, accomplishment or even on the revelation we have received, we will inevitably stay in one place too long. Beware! The Egypt of Genesis will become the Egypt of Exodus. Then bondage, ceaseless activity and opposition to new life will mark us again.

Joseph never dreamed that the Israelites would stay in Egypt so long. Do you think he anticipated that his bones would lie in Egypt for 400 years when he gave instructions for them to be taken out with the people?

Have you grown weary of the way some men control what happens in the church, albeit supposedly on behalf of Christ? Are you exhausted with all the activity that is demanded of you? Has church pressure brought tension to your home? Do you feel deprived, through weariness and the pressure of time, of relaxed fellowship with neighbors and friends? Is it difficult for you to maintain a fresh and vital love relationship with Jesus?

Good news! Yes, good news indeed! As it was with the Israelites, so it is with us. Father wants us to come to a much, much better place. It is the purpose of this book to clearly share the path to that land. But before we find that path, wouldn't you like a description of our destination?

CHAPTER TWO

That Amazing Place

The most familiar description of the place to which God resolved to bring His people is that of a "land flowing with milk and honey." This is delightful descriptive language indicating a great abundance of what were scarce commodities to the Israelites, who had been wandering the desert for forty years. When we set our hearts to discover how the Lord Jesus can actually and truly be the center of our lives, we turn our feet toward a land that flows with the abundance of His grace.

It is my deep conviction that we must be wholly prepared to abandon anything that retards our moving toward the place where Christ is all and in all, where we come to overflow with that which has flowed over us. This is true even though we may have to forsake things we have been taught or conditioned to believe are essential ingredients of church life.

Recently a fine, earnest brother shared his dilemma with me. "I am trying to come to grips with church involvement. Two weeks ago my pastor reprimanded me for not being involved and active enough. But my problem is that when I seek to do that, in some way I lose the sweet fragrance of relaxed, intimate fellowship with Jesus. And when I give priority to sitting at His feet and sharing life with Him, I seem to lose heart for church involvement."

Before you pass judgment, let me hasten to assure you that this is a believer who deeply desires that Jesus be glorified in his life. He has repeatedly been able to effectively share the good news of Jesus in his place of employment. I suspect that he is very far from alone in his predicament.

Good news! God is setting His people free from anything that resembles the sad situation of the Israelites described in the first chapter of Exodus. Even now in many places around the world the Lord is bringing forerunners into a land where a simple walk with Jesus has been restored, where man-made form, rule, structure and activity have been abandoned, where fresh and flowing life is standard.

Yet our joyful focus is not simply on what we have been released from, but on what we have been released into. We need to be quite clear on this point: There is much that deserves to be abandoned and abolished, but that is not sufficient. We must enter the land of promise! This book is an attempt to bring revelation from the Lord concerning this high adventure.

Satisfying Spiritual Milk

One thing the phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" indicates is that Father intended His people to have more than they could ever need for healthy, vibrant growth. Too few attain to a mature fullness in life in the dimension of the spirit. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that most believers today are intensely aware of the natural, material world, but are at best only sporadically alert to the presence of the Lord Jesus and to the way in which the Holy Spirit attempts to involve Himself in the details of our daily living.

The rich fulness to which Father purposes to bring us can be glimpsed in the following vividly descriptive Bible verses:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6-7

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ...

2Corinthians 2:14

.. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses... to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Little wonder, then, that Peter enjoins us, *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."* It is a taste of Jesus Himself that starts us thirsting, craving, deeply desiring milk for growth. Yes, our spiritual maturity is found in the drinking of Jesus' life, not in church, Christian leaders, or even the Bible!

In Isaiah 55 the Lord calls those who are thirsty to come to Him and drink. Today Father still calls those who are thirsty to come to Him!

If the questions at the beginning of this book stirred a thirst within you for a better day, then be mightily encouraged. There is a land flowing with that which satisfies spiritual thirst.

Supernatural Sweetness

Years ago we heard a preacher declare that the Holy Spirit desires to do such a work in people's hearts that, whenever they are jostled and bumped around in life, all that spills over is sweetness. We believe this unreservedly. Haven't we too frequently observed nasty, sour, even bitter things happen in church life? Shouldn't this make us aware of how much today's believers—and not the least, church leaders—need to adventure forth toward the land that flows with the honey of sweet grace?

How unforgettably attractive are those whose lives seem to be immersed in and saturated by the pure sweetness of the love of Christ, which constrains them to walk as He walked. Astonishingly, Father's intention is that this be the norm in Christian experience! Let's enter the land where Jesus is so central and where His life overflows through His people to such an extent that awakened shiners gather like bees around a honey pot to discover the source of such

life!

Plenty of Room!

When God promised Moses that he would bring His people to a new land, He described it as "a good and spacious land." Let us not underrate the value of pure goodness! It should be most encouraging for us to know there is a place where such goodness is found that Father can look on His handiwork in us and declare, "It is very good." Father's design for His Body is that nothing contrary to or conflicting with goodness ever be found there.

Spaciousness! Oh, for room to breathe deeply, to grow unrestrictedly, to mature fully, to expand in the spiritual dimension of life, to freely and wholeheartedly respond to the Holy Spirit without anyone feeling that we are conflicting or competing with them! Does God have a spacious place in the Spirit for us where there is room enough to dream our dreams and see our visions, to wholly respond to fresh revelations from Him? Is there room enough for us to love what He loves, hate what He hates and ignore what He ignores? In the deepest corner of our hearts a whisper replies, "Being the God that He is, He must have such a place!"

Waters of Life

Listen to this: "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing"

(Deut. 8:7-9a).

The concept of a land with broad rivers and streams implies a place where dry times are no more. Christians may well experience a desert of testing or of being alone with God, but surely it is not a loving Father's intention that we go through times of dryness and drought. Never! There is a lifestyle made possible for us by the Lord in which we can live in the river of His life and blessing.

Let me confess with shame that in the past I have known times of staleness in my spiritual life, even when I have been involved in Christian ministry. Sadly, I doubt that I am unique in that! But by God's grace I will never know staleness again. Repeatedly I have sought the Lord for divine enablement to walk in perpetual freshness for the rest of my life, for His glory alone.

I have come to see that there is one thing worse than being stale and dry: becoming comfortable with that condition. If we sufficiently hate the thought of discrediting the God of all grace by remaining in that state, we will most certainly find freedom from it. Let's be angry about it with a righteous indignation, earnestly reaching out to God for a better place.

Glorious Fruitfulness

When we enter a land of broad rivers and streams, and learn to live in the river of God's goodness, then we realize what is meant by lacking nothing because of the fruitfulness of the land.

Haven't you ever marvelled at the evidence the spies brought back to Moses? *"They cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole*

between them, along with some pomegranates and figs" (Num. 13:23). What astonishing fruitfulness—two men carrying one bunch of grapes!

Although the picture is different, it brings to mind the blessing of Christ to His disciples. Their boat began to sink because of the enormous number of fish they had caught. Why? Because Jesus was on the scene and they obeyed Him even when what He requested seemed unreasonable to their natural minds.

Jesus made it very clear: We can come to a place in the land of the living where we bear much fruit, fruit that remains. If the Holy Spirit had free and unrestricted sway in our lives, He would undoubtedly rapidly produce a remarkable harvest of Christ-likeness. There is a marvelous day coming in which there will not only be an amazing harvest of the abundant life of Christ-likeness among believers, but also of the ungodly entering salvation's fullness.

More than that, "*The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes' "* (**Amos 9:13**). And, "*In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias"* (**Joel 3:18**).

There is no reason why these things should not come to pass in our day. They speak of a stupendous harvest coming with supernatural rapidity.

"Mountains and hills" refers to the fact that life and blessing will flow from what God sovereignly raises up, not from anything man establishes. However, if these things are to come to pass, there must be a radical commitment to do whatever the Lord asks of us and to follow wherever He leads, regardless of cost and consequence.

Exploration and Adventure

When the Lord spoke to Joshua after Moses' death He told him, concerning the land he was about to enter, "*I will give you every place where you set your foot.*"

There is no place in God's plan for His people on earth to have the attitude, "We have arrived; we have attained all that is intended for us." This is one of the marvels of God—there is always more! In the land of promise there is no place to sit back smugly without the desire for more of the infinite depths of God's love being manifested in His people. That is, not until the Lord Jesus looks upon the bride He has won for Himself and avows, "I am satisfied with her." What a day that will be!

Today many may rightly feel they have entered into new experiences, gained new knowledge, attained fresh heights of faith. It is dangerously possible to be limited by what we already know, and thus to frown with disapproval on anyone who explores further afield in the land. We ought to fear what we know much more than what we do not know. May God give us all a fresh spirit of adventure.

Giants in the Land

Ten spies returned to the Israelites from the promised land with a negative report: *"There are giants in the land."* Yet Joshua and Caleb had confidence in the Lord, declaring they could well take the land. When we walk within the circle of God's favor we can easily take the land, giants or not.

Perhaps we should see giants as a provision of God's grace to keep us aware of our continual need of His assistance. He is honored when we rely on Him every moment of the day.

We once declared in a gathering, on the Lord's behalf, "I have farmers here," says the Lord, 'who farm with a new quality of excellence because they no longer solely rely on their training at agricultural college, nor on their years of experience. They see themselves as My children. When I tell them that this time I want something done differently, they simply reply, "Yes, Dad," and do it My way."

This message went on to mention mothers to whose motherhood was added a new quality of excellence because of a like spirit. This was for those in other categories too. It became clear that even in maturity we are well advised to see ourselves as "Dad's boy" or "Dad's girl" and avail ourselves of His willing parental assistance. Childlikeness should mark us all of life through, though childishness should be a thing of the past.

With a Father like ours, who needs to fear giants? But they do tend to keep us close to Him, and there is blessing in that.

This is a brief look at the land promised to the people of God. It's a marvelous place—a great place to be!

CHAPTER THREE

Why the Delay?

A land of freedom and blessing in which the Lord Jesus is truly central welcomes us. Why not set our hearts now to enter it, no matter how daunting some facets of this adventure may seem?

The Lord Jesus extended a most appealing invitation to the crowds who were burdened by the religious system of the land at that time: *"Come here to me, all who are growing weary to the point of exhaustion, and have been loaded with burdens and are bending beneath their weight, and I alone will cause you to cease from your labor and take your burdens and thus refresh you with rest. Take at once my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find cessation from labor and refreshment for your souls, for my yoke is mild and pleasant, and my load is light in weight"* (Matt. 11:28-30, Wuest).

Could anyone decline an invitation like that? Yet you know the story. Before too long, incited by their religious leaders, the very people who had received His invitation clamored for Christ's death!

A Lost Generation

The Israelites of Exodus were oppressed by dominant authoritarian leadership, driven to fulfill onerous tasks from which they gained virtually no benefit at all, and faced with the heart-rending prospect of having their sons slaughtered at birth. Surely they would feel they couldn't tolerate that situation for one more day and would immediately turn to the God of their fathers for salvation, wouldn't they?

Chapter two of the Book of Exodus records the marriage of Moses' parents, his upbringing and eventually his own marriage and parenthood. After that long period of time, *"the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them"* (Exod. 2:23-25).

Following that, the Lord spoke to Moses from a burning bush with the good news that He had *"come down to rescue them [the Israelites] from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Exod. 3:8).

God does hear the cry of His people! How sad that the Israelites had waited through a whole generation before crying out to God concerning their slavery. Is it possible that this present generation could be deprived of a far better place in God unless we desperately cry out to God to release us from the bondage of systems and men who strive ever harder to make Christianity work? The burdens grow heavier. A load is placed on God's people that

neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.

The multiplied efforts of men, no matter how well-intentioned, are not bringing in the Kingdom of God. Through recent decades people who have come into new dimensions of life in the Spirit have come to rely on different styles of worship, ministry and church lifestyle. How long will it be before they tire of it all, honestly facing up to the fact that far too little progress is being made in bringing the Church to mature fullness, especially in bringing precious lost people to life-transforming salvation in Jesus Christ?

Leading the People Out

Moses was less than eager to respond to God's call to go back to Egypt and lead the people into the freedom of a new day. This reluctance was based on his feeling that he was so insignificant that the people wouldn't be likely to listen to him. Even if he were to tell them that God had revealed Himself to him supernaturally and sent him to them, he doubted they would believe him. Moses admitted to the Lord that he had never been eloquent, but rather was slow of speech and tongue.

The Lord was patient with Moses throughout this dialogue. Today we would do well to learn that keenness to be a leader is very often an expression of carnal ambition. Christ-likeness chooses a servant role.

However, when Moses prayed, *"O Lord, please send someone else to do it,"* the Lord's anger burned against him. A healthy awareness of our nothingness and a lack of dependence on our own ability are fine, but they should never be used as an excuse not to do whatever Father requires of us. Rather, they should cause us to draw deeply from the resources of His grace. How well Paul testified from personal experience, *"The Lord said to me, 'My grace is enough for you, all on its own. My power shows up best in weak people.'"* (See 2 Corinthians 12:9.)

Initially, when Moses and Aaron informed the elders of the Israelites of everything the Lord had said to Moses, and when Moses performed before the people the signs God had given him, they believed, bowed down and worshiped. But Pharaoh rejected the request that Moses and Aaron made of him, forcing the Israelites to toil even harder than before.

When the Israelites realized there was a cost involved in finding freedom, they were reluctant to listen to Moses and Aaron or to acknowledge their leadership. They had plainly forgotten the promises of God to their forefathers and reconciled themselves to remaining in their present condition for the rest of their lives. The lesson to be learned from this is quite obvious, isn't it?

A Higher Way

God has a higher way! Years ago we heard of a prophetic utterance brought forth at a leadership conference:

"I will not renew what I did not build," says the Lord." That sounds simple enough, but it is simply profound. No energy should be expended, nor effort undertaken, to prop up or to perpetuate anything that man has built, for it is unquestionably doomed to destruction.

When Samaria was in sore straits and near starvation because the Syrians had laid siege to it, the prophet Elisha declared to the king of Israel, *"Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a [measure] of fine flour will sell for a shekel and two [measures] of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."*

This seemed too good to be true, a completely impossible occurrence. The officer on whose arm the king of Israel was leaning said to Elisha, *"Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?"* (See **2 Kings 7**)

Can freedom from tradition and entrance into a supernatural blending of healthy naturalness and dynamic, ultimate and perpetual fellowship with Jesus ever actually happen in the imperfect people that we are? Let me share two things with you. The first is that in many places it is already happening. For example, it is now reported and acknowledged that in New Zealand thousands of vibrantly alive believers have moved out of human church structures, toward the better place God has for us all.

Secondly, let me share a promise that I am absolutely convinced comes from the Lord. 'A brief yesterday ago,' says the Lord, 'you would have scoffed at the very idea that communism's mighty structures; system and leadership would crumble and collapse. Millions in bondage have found freedom at much less cost than could possibly have been foreseen, and far more rapidly than the armies of nations could have accomplished it.

"Look at what I have done, and give Me credit for it,' says your God, 'and know this, that I have it in My heart to do a more wonderful thing in releasing those who are Mine from a tyranny they scarcely know exists, so that they may in actuality overflow with My life and live in Me in continual freshness and triumph. For My sake, and for My Kingdom's sake, please seek Me for this with all your heart so that I may be adequately glorified on the earth,' says the Lord."

Is there a stirring in the hearts of God's people today to pray for revival? Bless Him for that! Perhaps what we are sharing here will be part of the expression of God's grace in revival that will bring a brand new day for the Church of God, an outpouring that will overflow to bring salvation life to huge numbers of people who do not yet know Jesus.

How relevant and precious the remarks of Joshua and Caleb: *"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us"* (Num. 14:7-8).

Let there be no further delay! The doom of the officer on whose arm the king of Israel was leaning has been recorded. The discussion of the four lepers at the gate of Samaria should be noted: *"Why stay here until we die? If we say, 'We'll go into the city'—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die."*

These four saw that the majority were wrong! They had to venture forth on their own. Even though the path they chose appeared to involve high risks, they knew the alternatives were far too dangerous to contemplate.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Way into the Land

The Israelites rested for three days before entering the land they had been promised. Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

An important instruction was taken throughout the camp: *"When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."* (See Joshua chapter three.)

We need to be certain of which way to go! On the church scene today there are so many voices, so many charismatic personalities, so many emphases, so many groups and "streams," as well as ever so many new methods, different understandings and downright fads, that there is every excuse for close questioning of anything we hear or read.

Can we be unmistakably sure of the correct next step for us to take and the right direction to move in? Yes, we can! The Instruction still holds good. "Watch the Ark, and follow it." If we can apply the principle involved in this statement, we will know which way to go in moving beyond the parameters of current experience and understanding.

Follow the Ark

The Ark was the Ark of the Presence. *"Place the cover on top of the ark...there...I will meet with you,"* Moses was instructed (Exod. 25:21-22). In my own life walk I see this challenge to be twofold: first, that the manifest presence of the Lord be observable, and second, to encourage and accept whatever has on it the unmistakable stamp of the anointed, manifest presence of God.

Some sing and speak about coming into the presence of the Lord when either entering a certain kind of building or commencing a certain kind of activity. Where have they been? Surely they should be living constantly in the blessed presence of the One who said He would never leave us. The fact is, if we truly are members of Father's lovely family, then He is with us whether we are aware of it or not. But we miss out much more than we understand if we don't find a way to *"practice the presence."* Then He misses out too!

The Ark was also the Ark of the Glory. Perhaps you recall how Eli's daughter-in-law named her newborn son Ichabod, saying, *"The glory has departed from Israel."* She said this because of the capture of the Ark (1 Sam. 4:21). Moses, Aaron and all the people had known the manifest glory of God. The Lord had promised, *"The tent of meeting will be consecrated by My glory."* And it had happened! *"Then the cloud [of glory] covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle"* (Exod. 40:34).

Today the ministry of the Spirit is even more glorious, for what was glorious in Moses' day has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory, which lasts. Paul's

revelatory statement of God's present intention for His people teaches, *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"* (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Our "Amen!" is added to Paul's fervent expression, "To [our God] be glory in the church...throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!" (Eph. 3:21) May the Lord teach us how to watch and follow the Ark of divine glory.

The Ark was the Ark of Blessing and Favor. During the three-month period in which the Ark remained in the house of Obed Edom, the Lord blessed him and his entire household to such an extent that David heard of it and set out to bring the Ark into the City of David. (See Second Samuel chapter six.) The Ark was the Ark of the Voice. When the Benjamites slew forty thousand Israelites, the other Israelites went up to Bethel and sat weeping before the Lord. The record declares, *"In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there...They asked, 'Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?' The Lord responded, 'Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands.'"* (See Judges chapter twenty.)

It is extremely important that we come to a place of clearly and consistently hearing the Lord for ourselves. *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Cor. 3:16) The Living Bible declares, "You have received the Holy Spirit and he lives within you, in your hearts, so that you don't need anyone to teach you what is right. For he teaches you all things, and he is the truth..." (1 John 2:27)*

In the final analysis, we only hear God in one way: by inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. We should only accept what even godly people teach us if the Holy Spirit within us assures us that it is the word of the Lord for us.

Some years ago I attended a conference of spiritual leaders. On the first morning I became very aware of a prompting of the Holy Spirit which can be verbalized thus: *"If it doesn't warm your heart, it is not My word for you."* I walked in that, not even attending gatherings if my heart wasn't warmed at the prospect. Whether truth was being shared or not was quite irrelevant, because the Holy Spirit was clearly indicating that it wasn't for me at that stage. It is a great way to live, walking in what we are hearing from the Lord who is the Spirit within us!

The Ark was the Ark of Rest. *"So they set out from the mountain of the Lord [Sinai] and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. The cloud of the Lord was over them when they set out from the camp" (Num. 10:33-34).*

There is an Ark of rest for us which provides a deep inner peace regardless of circumstance, which allows us to move in rest because our ears are tuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that we simply follow the Lord of our lives.

Above everything else, The Ark is the Lord! "The Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessing in his name, as they still do today. That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as the

Lord your God told them" (Deut. 10:8-9).

The challenge is clear: If we are to know which way we should go as we venture where we have never been before, we must keep our gaze fixed on the Lord Jesus Himself, listening to His voice and following Him alone. We are called and privileged to follow the Lord of glory, the Lord of the manifest presence, the Lord who blesses wonderfully, the Lord who gives continuing rest, who is also the Lord who keeps speaking to us through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Keep Your Distance!

There may well have been practical reasons that justified the requirement that the Israelite horde stay half a mile away from the Ark, but there are points of symbolic importance as well.

It is precious and vital to have an Ultimate love walk with Jesus, enjoying His friendship and camaraderie. At the same time, we dare not lose sight of the awesome-ness of His glorious majesty, nor the breathtaking consciousness that He is eternally Lord God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Intimacy must never be replaced by flippancy, and naturalness must never debase our relationship with Jesus so that we take lightly the high privilege of being a child of God.

To emphasize the point, perhaps we should hear Him say to us, "Enjoy the intimacy of My love and of My close, abiding presence, but also maintain a sense of awe in which you stand back, stand still and never lose sight of the fact that I am the God who will be exalted among the nations."

Is It Truly God?

Another consideration is the need to stand back enough to make very sure that we are not being influenced by what may look like God, but is actually the impact of a dynamic charismatic personality, the strength of human leadership ability or the demonstration of natural soulful power. Anyone with uncertainty concerning these areas would be well advised to read Watchman Nee's book, *The Latent Power of the Soul*. (New York: Christian Fellowship Pub., 1972).

We need to stand back "half a mile" so the Holy Spirit can give us His assessment of the situation, spiritual discernment of the measure of true Christ-likeness of character being manifested and an understanding of whether the Ark is leading us in that particular direction.

We ought not feel that we can sit in judgment of the various people and groups that clamor for our attention, involvement and support. We can safely leave that to the Lord and thus avoid the possibility of becoming critical, negative and destructive. But we should most certainly be led by the Holy Spirit to soberly evaluate our involvement and relationship with them. It is sad to see how many of us, after years of participation in an activity or of strongly propounding our understanding of some emphasis or practice, eventually perceive that we have fruitlessly been going around a mountain that we should have moved on from long since.

God Is Very Jealous!

During a period in which I was inactive for many months because of physical weakness, I sought the Lord with a question that I believe He stirred in me. It was simply this: "Lord, what is Your opinion of Your Church in this land?" I was at home in New Zealand at the time, but you may want to weigh the answers I eventually received with the spiritual condition of your home country.

Gradually, over a period of many weeks, I became strongly convinced that Father isn't very pleased with His Church here. Naturally this caused me to seek His face, acknowledging the Tightness of His assessment of us and pleading for mercy. Thankfully, I did come to a conviction that He will turn the face of His favor toward us again.

One of the ways in which the Holy Spirit showed me Father's displeasure was to bring to my attention the enormous amount of activity that takes place, supposedly on the Lord's behalf, with comparatively little result. If our working harder could bring in the Kingdom, we would be there already! The Bible makes it clear that God acts on the basis of how well we trust Him, not how much we do for Him.

Beyond that, I was shown what takes place when good things do happen—and in God's grace He favors us with much more than we deserve or desire. Whenever unbelievers turn to Jesus for salvation; whenever Christians are touched by the Holy Spirit in a precious, God-glorifying way; whenever miracles take place; whenever local churches have an influx of new people... man is given the credit!

The finger of credit is firstly pointed man-ward, to that preacher, that group, someone's prayers, a certain method, some "brand name" or other. These are spoken of as though the accomplishment were men's. How dreadful! Belatedly, of course, lip service is paid to God's involvement. No wonder God is displeased with us!

God is a jealous God. He will not allow anyone else to share His glory. When men take credit for what God has done—and it happens much more often than is realized—we deprive ourselves of the best of what Father in His grace desires for us. We must be very careful about this if we are going to enjoy the fullness of Father's intentions for us in the land He has promised.

So let us keep our eyes on the Ark, our precious Lord Jesus Himself. Let us follow Him with alacrity, walking in tender purity, carefully giving God all the credit He deserves, even in our innermost thoughts and attitudes. Failure at this point has deprived this present generation of the glorious best that Father has intended for us.

I pray that Holy Spirit revelation will be given to each person who reads this chapter. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened in order that you may know that wholehearted following of these steps will bring you to a personal experience of the lifestyle expressed by the questions in the early pages of this book.

Yes, it is very simple; but it does require radical commitment to love and follow Jesus with your whole heart... alone, if need be. Following the Ark across the Jordan of death to one's own desires and importance is only the beginning. There's a whole land to be possessed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reproach Removed

Joshua and all Israel were miraculously brought by the Lord into Canaan. They were given the land in such a manner that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and that His people might always fear the Lord their God. His mighty arm and outstretched hand were active on their behalf.

In a later generation Nehemiah blessed the Lord, speaking of the days when the Israelites entered the land. "They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness" (9:25-26).

They didn't have to wait years before tasting the fruit of the land. Before they even faced Jericho, we are told, "The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate this food" (Josh. 5:11- 12a).

Shortly after entering the land, they were able to partake of its abundance. God's gracious temporary provision of manna was superseded by much better fare.

When God Spoke

In Joshua chapter five we read, "At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again. So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites...Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' "

If there was one outstanding key to Joshua's success in leading the people into full possession of the land, it was that when God gave him something to say, he said it. When God gave him something to do, he did it! Joshua had come to the place where he recognized the voice of God to him beyond doubt or question.

We all need to come to that place! Revelation on God's part and response on ours are intended to be the norm of our daily life. Jesus spoke of Himself and His flock: "He walks ahead of them; and they follow him, for they recognize His voice" (John 10:4, TLB).

Response, or obedience, should always be unconditional and unequivocal. Concern about the consequences of our obedience to God can rob us of heaven's choice blessings, as can overmuch concern about supposed orthodoxy, concern about our ability (or lack of it) to do what is asked of us and concern about the attitudes or reactions of people we esteem spiritually.

Circumcision of the Heart

The Lord asked Joshua to circumcise the people. The renewal of this rite indicated a reaffirmation that they were especially, particularly, wholly the Lord's own possession.

Paul wrote about circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit, saying of those experiencing it, *"Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God"* (Rom. 2:29b).

In the Book of Deuteronomy we are informed that God circumcises the heart so that His people may love the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul, and live. It is further stated that following circumcision of the heart, *"The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, if you obey the Lord your God and keep His commands"* (Deut. 30:9-10).

This circumcision speaks of self-crucified living. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). He proceeded to say that the giving up of life for His sake and the gospel's enables us to live as we couldn't otherwise live.

How wise of Paul to declare, *"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (Gal. 6:14). He understood what many of us are slow to discover; namely, that we cannot walk in resurrection life and power unless and until we become like Christ in His death. Continuously walking in the place of the cross enables us to experience resurrection living continually. Circumcision was God's requirement for further progress into the Promised Land.

Whose Reproach?

A friend once asked me, "John, where will the stigma be next?" A good question! Over the centuries, anyone who dared to venture beyond what was widely accepted has had to endure misunderstanding, derision and sometimes vicious attack from those who felt they were defending truth.

How can reproach be removed by adventuring into unexplored spiritual territory? Without doubt, such action will cause misunderstanding, concern and possibly even rejection by supposedly good friends. The issue is this: To whom were the Israelites a reproach while they were in Egypt and while they wandered in the wilderness? They were a reproach to their God!

When any of God's children are in bondage and under domination of one sort or another, their state is a reproach to the Lord of unlimited might who has provided freedom and triumph for them. A needless lack of quality living on our part certainly does not honor Him or adequately display the beauties of His amazing grace.

It is a reproach to our precious Lord Jesus when any of His children are involved in fruitless activity. Do you remember Gamaliel's inspired counsel? He advised the Jewish authorities, *"If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God"* (Acts 5:38-39).

Too many of us are slavishly making bricks for the building programs of men's misplaced zeal or to aid the fulfillment of their carnal ambition. This is a reproach to the Lord we profess to love with all our hearts!

What was Martha's fault? Surely it was that she had been moved to invite Jesus to her home, then expected Mary to work to fulfill her vision. Inviting Jesus to their home was an excellent gesture, and busily providing for His comfort was no less so; but placing Mary under obligation in the matter was not. Can you see that? Can you apply it to your situation?

Other Causes of Reproach

There are other obvious things that give reproach to the Name of the Lord. Here are some: inconsistency, ineffectiveness and comparative powerlessness, earthiness, selfishness, mediocrity and materialistic pleasure-seeking. This list is not given to bring a burden of guilt on anyone, but to encourage an earnest seeking for a God-glorifying quality of life. We would desire that the mention of such things be used by the Holy Spirit to bring about an eager willingness to receive reproach rather than be a reproach to the Lord.

The grace of God is sufficient to release us from all that is substandard and to usher us into a new day of fragrant, Christ-like living.

In addition to the above mentioned things, there are others that are not so obvious. When Jesus walked this earth, some people were in special need of His healing, releasing touch. Today some need to have their ears opened because of their uncertain hearing. Others have blurred or selective vision and need a farther touch to their inner eyes. Some need to be released from dumbness and the lack of quality expression—which is strange, really, since in the main we are a generation of wordiness beyond Father's desire. Still others walk with stumbling slowness and need to be healed of their spiritual lameness.

All of these things are a reproach to our very wonderful Lord, even though they may save us from bearing a cross of reproach for Jesus' sake. Shame!

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit," advised the apostle Paul (Gal. 5:25, NAS). An aspect of the new place to which the Holy Spirit is leading the people of God comprises our being alive, aware and alert in the spiritual dimension of life. This is to be the case, not simply in gatherings, but in the midst of the normal round of daily activity and responsibility. There is a desperate need for high quality integrated living in which we walk in the Spirit while we are walking in the natural involvements of family, work and recreational life. Unless experienced, the joy and blessing of such a lifestyle cannot be adequately imagined or described.

Corporate Reproach

Most of the aspects mentioned thus far focus on the danger of individuals being a reproach to the Lord, though some of them certainly need to be applied to the corporate church.

Whenever a fellowship of people is not practicing the purity, freedom and simplicity of a New Testament lifestyle, it is a reproach to Jesus and a hindrance to the establishment of His Kingdom. Over the years so much has been added to what God intended for us by the religiosity, carnal reasoning, and humanistic, place-seeking kingdom building of men that it is impossible to envisage what the Church should be like today unless we receive divine revelation

about it.

At the very heart of today's substandard church life is bondage to human control. Lip service is paid to the thought that Jesus is Head of the Church and that we are led by the Holy Spirit in all that we do.

But let someone submit to Christ in a way that church leadership doesn't understand, approve of and appreciate, and their claim to the right of control will soon be manifest! If someone dares follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in a way that seems incompatible with "the way we are building," he will soon be called to order and required to follow his leaders rather than the promptings of the Holy Spirit within. Lofty phrases and convincing Bible terms will be used, of course!

Linked with human control and human dependence are divisive sectarianism, elevated professional leadership (usually of one person in the local church) and an inordinate emphasis on activity, teaching and meetings. These tend to make it difficult for one to walk in the Spirit and in a sweet love relationship with Jesus. They tend to bring a lack of trust in the Lord, requiring too much trust in human leadership and activity. They also take away the freedom of personal, wholehearted response to the promptings of the Spirit.

Resurrection Church Life

Can you see the present desperate need for corporate resurrection life based on the selflessness of corporate crucified living? Let's think about that in the picture Paul gives in First Corinthians chapter fifteen of the resurrection of the body—in this case applying it to the thought of resurrection life now for the Body of Christ on earth.

"The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable." Everything that man builds and that is based on human wisdom, strength and initiative is guaranteed to perish. There is immense folly in being involved in such things. Each step that the Lord takes in the building of His Church is guaranteed to last

"It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory." Although some aspects of church life today are no credit to the Lord — are actually a reproach to Him — Father does intend that we be: raised to a place where He is wonderfully glorified.

Anyone who struggles with the thought that the very widely a reproach and a cause of dishonor to God should talk to an unbeliever about the Lord Jesus, in men's minds the concepts of God and of our human expression of the Church have been so joined together that in rejecting the falsity and emptiness of the latter, unbelievers feel they must reject God as well.

"It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." It is always a great blessing to participate in the life of a fellowship of believers where there is a vibrant portrayal of ongoing spiritual life and where the wonder and glory of God's manifest presence is almost overwhelming and exceedingly precious. Almost invariably, however such quality is fleeting and spasmodic. Many churches are as natural in form, business procedure and leadership as a service club or a business house. Resurrection of the Body is needed now!

"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." It is uplifting and encouraging to dream of the Church being a clear and faithful representation on earth of the likeness of the Son of God. May God

grant it in our day! When He does there will no longer be a need to rely on grandiose schemes, charismatic personalities, impressive buildings, sectarian superiority, endless programs, multiplied meetings and high-pressure, artificial evangelism.

A personal commitment to adventure into the virgin territory of God's further establishment of His Kingdom and further preparation of His bride can have a far-reaching effect. To be a forerunner is a high privilege. In some mysterious way in the realm of the Spirit, this privilege provides an opening for many more to follow us as we follow the Christ who dared to walk alone in doing His Father's will, and who willingly laid down His life that we may enter life eternal.

CHAPTER SIX

Oops, a Jericho!

As they crossed the plains on their journey toward the Jordan River before they came into Canaan, the Israelites had ample time and opportunity to look, and look again, at the strongly fortified city of Jericho. During the days they waited to be healed from the pain of circumcision, they could most probably have seen that city. It stood between them and further progress into the land they had waited so long to possess.

Isn't life like that? We frequently know that God in His great grace has provided a better quality of life for us than that which we are currently enjoying. We realize that the Holy Spirit is drawing us to respond to the inner call of God to move forward. But we can also be deeply conscious of a Jericho of seeming impossibility blocking the way. Furthermore, the longer we gaze at the particular obstacle we face, the higher its walls seem to be and the weaker we see ourselves to be.

When we come to a settled habit of life in which we customarily magnify the Lord in everything, causing Him to appear to us more like His actual size, we are saved from overly enlarging our problems and burdens. This brings them closer to their true size and provides an excellent basis for robust, healthy confidence in the Lord.

Many a believer, perhaps after one or two feeble attempts to confront his Jericho, has settled down to make the most of where he is. I was once strongly convinced that I would always be a weaker, less-than-the-average, stumbling, struggling Christian who would be grateful just to make it to heaven. Such a thought is a lie, of course; but at times it is a very convincing lie.

Every Jericho can be conquered!

What the People of Jericho Couldn't See

There is always more to a situation than meets the eye, especially for those who love the Lord. Thus it was at Jericho.

When Joshua was near Jericho he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

"Neither," He replied. *"But as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."* Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence and asked Him, *"What message does my Lord have for His servant?"*

The commander of the Lord's army replied, *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."* And Joshua did so.

The most noteworthy aspect of this incident is that the factor of the unseen presence of the Lord was a crucial element for the confrontation with Jericho. (See Joshua chapters five and six.) That certainly is more than meets the eye!

Over the years I have relished John Wesley's magnificent statement, "*Best of all, God is with us!*" That fact radically changes the balance of forces for any forthcoming encounter with opposition or difficulty, does it not?

Perhaps we should note, however, that the question is not so much whether God is on our side, but whether we are on His! So many petitions presented before the throne of grace are requests for God to bless plans and activities without their being aligned with His plans. Frequently, even when we have correctly discovered God's purposes, we move forward on the basis of our own wisdom, reasoning and experience rather than being led step by step by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is Commander of heaven's armies! We need not be overly anxious as to how many people are on our side. Humanism places value on the number of people supporting a cause, but faith relies on God. Don't some people give the impression that God will answer prayer for a sick or needy person if enough believers will join in praying for them? Jesus indicated that two are enough if they are at harmony in heart. He gave strong encouragement for even one person who asks the Father for something according to the nature of the Lord Jesus.

These days it is quite popular to believe that we can order angels to do our bidding, but Jesus Himself is their Commander. Perhaps our understanding of Hebrews 1:14 should take into consideration the wording of the Amplified Bible: "*Are not the angels all (servants) ministering spirits, sent out in the service [of God for the assistance] of those who are to inherit salvation?*"

What the People of Jericho Could See

Joshua received instructions from the Lord with a detailed plan of action for the defeat of Jericho. He obeyed to the letter, even though natural reason could easily have questioned the plan and doubtless have proposed an apparently wiser scheme. We sometimes seem to be exceedingly slow in learning that God's ways are invariably better than man's without tampering of any kind. Why should we be slower to respond to the Lord because we don't understand why He prompts us to act in a certain way, or because we imagine that the consequences of doing so will be unpleasant for us? Many a blessing and many a miracle are missed because of that!

At the core of the Lord's directive to Joshua was the Ark of the Covenant. This was to be carried by the priests, with the Israelites following behind. Seven priests moved in front of the Ark, blowing trumpets of ram's horns as the city was encircled day after day.

The sound of the trumpets was the one sound to be heard as the sons of Israel marched around the city. Joshua had commanded, "*Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!*" This was strange procedure for an army of those times, but it would have had one major effect. The attention of the watchers on Jericho's walls would be fixed on the Ark, rather than on the antics of a raving army.

The carrying of the Ark and the blowing of the trumpets was a picturesque and impressive declaration: *"The Lord is in the midst of her!"* It was an announcement of the manifest presence of God among His people. With that being trumpeted forth there was no need for endless shouting from the Israelites in an endeavor to impress or intimidate the people of Jericho.

This is desperately needed today! When there is a clear demonstration of *"God with us"* in dynamic power and abounding grace, human efforts to impress others will seem tawdry indeed. The manifest presence of God in and among His people causes a wholesome sense of awe and amazement to grip all who experience it as His favor, blessing and anointing are poured upon them.

In New Testament times this manifest presence was scarcely, if ever, displayed in organized church meetings. If the gathering in the upper room of Acts chapter two can be considered such a time, it should be observed that the manifest coming of God upon the unbelievers brought an immediate end to the meeting as they moved out among the crowds of Jerusalem's amazed visitors, declaring the wonderful works of God.

To count on the unseen perpetual presence of God with us and to know His anointed, revealed presence upon us is enough to make us laugh with triumphal expectation at any Jericho we may face. Lack of awareness or experience of these blessings is at the root of the incredible wordiness in many gatherings of believers. A misplaced confidence in our persuasiveness and our capacity to bring desired results by human reason and ability also frequently hinders us.

Surely nobody would be crass enough to think that multiplicity of words impresses the Lord in the least! Further, such wordiness wearies and bores believers, as well as giving many unbelievers a deep dislike for everything connected with "church"!

Time to Shout

There are times when shouting appears to be considered a means to pump up faith, an attempt to impress God with a number of decibels or a reliance on noise to frighten demons. There is no merit in noise for noise's sake. Neither is there value in silence for the sake of silence.

After marching once around the city each day for six days, followed by marching around it seven times on the seventh day (thirteen times in all—superstitious people take note), there was to be a long blast on the trumpets. Joshua then commanded the people, *"Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!"* (Josh. 6:16)

It is quite different to shout because God has answered and there is sure faith in the certainty of divine accomplishment than to shout to stir up our faith or to try to bring about a desired result. The Lord had given the Israelites the city, so their shout was one of triumphant faith. Our outward shout should be the releasing of a shout that is already taking place inside us because of our unshakable confidence in our precious Lord Jesus.

Jesus' Triumph

Despite the words of the old spiritual, Joshua did not fight the battle of Jericho! Nor did the Israelites. The battle was the Lord's and the conquest was accomplished by the Lord of the armies of heaven.

It is a mistake to view the Christian life as one of warfare, involving battle after interminable battle. Insufficient notice is taken of Scripture's declaration about Jesus: *"Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"* (Col. 2:15).

The picture involved in this statement is of a conquering, triumphant general proudly parading into Rome with banners flying, marching to the accolades and plaudits of the cheering throngs, with the leaders of defeated armies tied spread-eagled to his chariot wheels. They once had been strong men, but now were robbed of their power and subject to the derision of the crowds who welcomed home their heroes.

Some Christians seem to be engaged in warfare with enemies that have long been defeated!

We are encouraged, *"Take to yourself, at once and once for all, the complete armor of God"* (Eph. 6:11, Wuest). *"This is so that we will be able to stand in the triumph of Jesus and not fight "... And having done all, to stand"* (v. 13).

Without this armor we will struggle *"against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* No wonder we are enjoined: *"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"* (Eph. 6:12,11).

In the context of the stated arena—the heavenly realms—let us not forget for one moment to live in the reality of Ephesians 1:3, which declares, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*

We are blessed with the privilege of sharing in His triumph! *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ..."* (2 Cor. 2:14) That certainly doesn't sound like struggling warfare and the possibility of repeated defeat, does it?

Furthermore, *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace"* (Eph. 2:6-7).

Christ is seated there at Father's right hand *"In the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come"* (Eph. 1:20-21). The declaration is unequivocally clear: *"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"* (vs. 22-23).

Good news! Jesus has triumphed, and we are privileged to share in His surpassing victory. Glory to God!

Whatever our particular troublesome Jericho, let us move forward with restful confidence in our wonderful Father. Let's cross over into a far better experiential knowledge of our dear Lord Jesus and of the land of God's promise for us today, that He may be more adequately glorified in His Church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What the Early Church Was Born With

Sometimes there is wisdom in reviewing the things we were born with when we became spiritually alive in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are some marvelous, valuable ingredients of the new birth that are the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us. There are other things that we tend to link with our conversion that are actually merely human additives which were probably given to us by the person who led us to Jesus or by the group of believers with whom we began to associate.

We are born into Father's lovely family with a love for Jesus and a desire to be like Him, for His pleasure. His companionship is our supreme joy, and overflowing with love for Him is a great delight. On occasions when we are convicted of a lack of Christ-likeness in attitude, speech or behavior, we feel very ashamed and deeply repentant. A tender conscience is like a beautiful, tender flower, needing to be treasured and protected.

We are also born with a capacity to hear the Holy Spirit. At that tune the Spirit Himself witnesses to us— testifies, convinces, assures, and inwardly persuades us— that we are children and heirs of God. We had been aware of His persuasiveness of our need before we came to Christ; therefore we deeply appreciate this new inner peace of divine assurance.

Were we to have been encouraged to follow the Spirit's leading from the time of our conversion, as He drew us on in love for Jesus and in the desire to be like Him, there is no doubt that doctrinal misunderstanding and brittleness would not have caused delay or detour in our spiritual development?

Perhaps some of us more than others were born with an appreciation of family. Certainly the Holy Spirit taught us to say, Abba, "Daddy." This vital relationship should be treasured and enjoyed throughout our lives, even in mature years.

There is remarkable simplicity in these things. Many of us today need to return to the simplicity in Jesus! The complicated additions that men and religion have contributed have not increased our spiritual maturity, nor have they promoted a leisurely, enjoyable, family- strengthening, sinner-appealing lifestyle.

When Jesus came to earth, His appeal, quite deliberately, was less to the society sophisticates, the politically important or the suave intelligentsia, and much more to the lowborn, the Insignificant, and those branded and treated with contempt. Surely this was because He brought a new sense of values, placing greater importance on love, purity, humility and favor with God. Isn't there a danger today that we have allowed the wrong sense of values to dominate, especially among church leaders?

The Early Church

The early Church was born with glorious assets that more than compensated (if compensation were ever needed) for all the paraphernalia, expertise and electronic wizardry of this modern age.

Jesus was a literal Person many had actually seen, heard and been deeply touched by. Who would ever forget His look of compassion toward an outcast, the fire in His voice and eye when He cast out the money changers, or the pathos Mary put into her efforts to describe the way He had spoken her name when He met her near the tomb? Who could escape the continuing echo of the spine-tingling awe that gripped them when Lazarus, having been dead for four days, came out of the grave, fully alive again? Who could remain unmoved at the recollection of the simple word of Jesus that caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear? Imagine a Church being born with that!

Similarly, the atoning cross and the triumphant resurrection were not a teaching to be believed, but were facts that had been observed. There is no substitute for the firsthand seeing, hearing and experiencing of God's presence, love, grace and supernatural power. How good of Jesus to pronounce a blessing on those who did not see, yet would accept the certainty of His resurrection as surely as if they had seen Him when Thomas did! (John 20:29)

Literal, physical, visual, personal experience of Jesus the Lord must have stimulated a lifelong all-possessive and pervasive love for Him. It must have nurtured a profound appreciation of the stupendous mission of mercy in which He humbled Himself to take the form of a slave, then humbled Himself even further, going to the cross.

The disciples must frequently have been gripped with an overflowing desire to inform everyone of the difference His touch had first made, and still made, on their lives. Little wonder that witnessing of Jesus' love and grace was the norm in the early Church!

Freedom Lifestyle

Many of these believers had seen the tongues of fire and heard the sound of a rushing mighty wind. They had been among those who tumbled out of the upper room declaring, in other tongues and with radiant faces of joyous triumph, the amazing works of God. How very anemic that makes much of today's often substandard "baptism in the Holy Spirit" seem by comparison. May God favor us with the depth and fullness of that experience to the extent that our lives are never again lived on a plane of fluctuation and mediocrity.

In addition, the new freedom of lifestyle that these people had espoused stood out in striking distinction from the burdensome, dutiful, rule-bound obligations of traditional religion. Even so, the new lifestyle some of us are discovering now contrasts vividly with the modern traditions of what may be termed a "renewed" church or fellowship lifestyle. I am not proposing a freedom to do whatever we choose, but a wonderful freedom from what "church" has mostly chosen for us, a freedom to walk in what satisfies our deepest heart longings. Traditional churchdom has virtually made God and church one and the same, but there is exquisite delight in loving Jesus with freedom from the impositions of man-made and humanly controlled church membership.

Having observed Jesus during His adult years, and having lived with His first followers among them, the early Church had a clearly set standard of holy love, wholesome purity, unembellished humility, Christ-like servant-hood and the experiential living out of loving God with the whole heart and soul, and of loving one's neighbor as oneself.

With the signal exception of Jesus, they were still imperfect and limited men, but the quality of their devotion to Jesus and their willingness to follow Him regardless of cost or consequence must have left an indelible impression on the mind and heart of many a believer of that day. To see others gladly—even proudly—suffer, be outcast and exiled, live or die as best honored their Lord, would have stimulated and inspired those who felt weak and ineffective to rise to new heights of practical faith in God.

In those days there was awareness even among unbelievers of the reality of what Jesus' followers shared. Many people had either known the transforming, miraculous touch of Jesus, or someone in their family had. Where was a town or village that did not have a living, walking expression of the miraculous, life-changing power of God?

Some had watched as the dead came forth out of their graves. Others had seen prisoners set free by the hand of God alone. Some had known the apostle Paul before his conversion and now could not refute the amazing transformation of his life and its absolutely different direction, emphasis and motivation.

A Flow of Life

Today's average Christian churchgoer isn't different enough to startlingly impress those who haven't yet met Jesus. What appeal is there in a lifestyle involving an apparently endless round of meetings? What attraction is there in gatherings which divide the family, sometimes leaving few evenings free for family interaction and enjoyment? Can you imagine Jesus the Nazarene announcing ahead of time special conferences and seminars, special offerings and guest speakers, building programs and sanctuary dedications?

Life flowed in the early Church! Jesus was the center of each person's life, and His life overflowed through them. "*They had been with Jesus*"—that's what made the difference! They knew Him, loved Him and followed Him. Jesus filled them, thrilled them, enthralled them, satisfied them and caused their lives to be full of heaven's sweetness, light and abounding life. He was more real, actually real and meaningful, than close friends and relatives could ever be.

Good news! This is the day of restoration to the best that the Church has ever known. This day will provide a platform for launching into orbit the uniquely better things that Father has in His heart, things He wants to make actual and functional in the redeemed in these days at the end of the age.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What the Early Church Didn't Have

In our search for the promised land of a fully God-glorifying experience and lifestyle, we need to look at the early Church, not only to be thrilled by the special blessings and privileges they enjoyed, but also to gain a clear and unambiguous, honest and radical understanding of what has been added over the centuries.

Why not endeavor to peel away from our current understanding and experience of church life all that has been added—which will probably be virtually every part of it? Then we will probably gain very clear insight into the way Father intended His Church to be! Why not seek to live in the reality of what we were born with and, as much as possible, of what the early Church was born with as well?

Some will contend that these human additions are not actually wrong in themselves. In some instances that could be a reasonable position to take. But surely it is out of order to give such additions the authority of law, demanding their unceasing acceptance and never-ending obedience, as though they were specifically demanded in the canon of Scripture.

What the Early Church Was Born Without

Almost as surprising and challenging as the things the early Church was born with is a list of what they were born without.

Nowadays it is difficult to conceive a day when there were no sects, no divisions, no denominational or independent fellowship "brand names." "The church in your home" was well understood in those early days, as was the geographical church, such as the church at Ephesus or the church of Colossae.

In its beautifully simple way of life, the early Church found no need for constitutions and by-laws, buildings and bank accounts, or even Bible colleges and seminaries. The New Testament contains no mention of Sunday schools, Bible classes or women's meetings. Thank God! Nor, for that matter, does it mention hymn books, overhead projectors, tapes, Christian books or Bibles.

Church membership rolls and printed church bulletins or news sheets had no place there either. This was not so much because membership may be larger now as because both consistent Christ-like love relationships and the norm of home gatherings provided a basis for all the communication that was necessary.

I wonder to what extent we maintain such features of modern church life as these to facilitate the growth of our own particular kingdoms, rather than the Kingdom of God? Isn't it extremely audacious to think that promoting the one expands the other? Have we sub-consciously decided that King Reason must reign in our systems, dictating what will be acceptable, effective and inoffensive in our modern, cultured, pleasure-loving society?

I also wonder with deep concern whether we realize how much many of these modern additions or traditions detract from the sweet and satisfying enjoyment of a pure and loving intimacy with Jesus. Do we see less of Him because we see so much of these other things? Do we hear less of Him because we are required to listen too much to the voices of men? Do we personally meet with Him too seldom because of all the meetings we are required to attend?

Does our precious Lord Jesus Himself see our man-made systems as rivals, demanding the time, energy, affection and commitment that He alone deserves?

Of course no early local church thought of existing simply to keep itself existing, or to prove that it was the fastest-growing church in the East—or the holiest, the most faithful, having the most dynamic leadership... Where are the people today who thrive on the laying down of the soul life, both individual and corporate, not caring what happens to them as long as Jesus is being glorified, as long as neighbors, friends and work associates are discovering salvation life in Him?

In the early Church there was no background of Christian tradition. This obviously meant there was little danger of being caught in the snare of subconsciously believing that the way the Holy Spirit showed us how to touch His heart once must be the way to repeatedly do things.

It may be argued that some of the things the early Church was born without are helpful and, in the case of the Scriptures, invaluable. However, we should never make these things the focus of our attention or trust. Early Church believers certainly didn't! We must jealously guard the centrality, preeminence and reality of Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and Lord of all, remembering that He is a jealous God.

We are very privileged to have the uniquely inspired Scriptures readily available to us today. But we need to note well that the only adequate Revealer, Interpreter and Teacher of them is the Holy Spirit, not churches and their human leadership. The Holy Spirit alone is able to adequately explain for our spiritual understanding, to make real in our practical daily living, whatever Bible portion may best promote our growth in godliness at any stage of life.

Modern Church Gathering

Gatherings today are frequently stifled by a particular group's idea of what comprises a normal, orthodox, predictable order of service. Even the freedom of unstructured fellowship gatherings is normally very predictable. We have long contended that whenever the predictability factor is too high, the revelatory factor is too low. In all creation the Lord emphasizes that He is a God of infinite variety. There is amazing strength in unity where the only bonds are love ties, but there is abject weakness where uniformity is expected and required.

Where did we learn to elect office holders and appoint leaders to entrenched positions? However did we come to see as normal the employment of a professional "ministry" of salaried staff? What brought us to believe that one-man leadership is the best way to run the local church?

My understanding is that the New Testament only allocates an office to one Person, and

that is Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

When the people of Israel demanded a king so they could be like the other nations, the word of the Lord to Samuel was that in so choosing they were not rejecting the prophet, but God Himself (1 Sam. 8:7). This seems to parallel both the situations where local churches look to one man as their leader and the current trend for groups to look to one man as "our apostle."

Have you heard of the disease of meetingitis? It is tragically easy to depend on the blessing and inspiration of meetings for our spiritual well-being, rather than on the Lord Himself. Why is a person described as a "faithful brother" merely because he is always at the midweek meeting? Who ordained routine mid-week meetings, anyway, or, for that matter, regular routine gatherings of any kind? (The loss of capacity to be amazed is called routine.) Can we not come to a place where there is more meeting because there are fewer meetings?

In a previous book, *The Church of My Dreams*, I tried to give understanding of the New Testament teaching on both meetings and leadership. A little later in this book I will endeavor to answer questions that we have since been asked about these matters.

Living Bread

We were once involved in a Sunday morning gathering which was being held in a home in Northern Ireland. Earlier a brother had placed bread and wine on a shelf, ready for "the breaking of bread." At one stage I was constrained to share with the believers there something that I was hearing from the Holy Spirit.

I felt strongly that the Lord Jesus wanted to say to us all, "My people bring that in here where it is not needed, from out there in the world where it is needed. Here you are already in communion with Me. Here you are already remembering Me."

The breaking of bread or communion service may be very touching, meaningful and inspiring to many. However, inherent in it is a real and grave danger: People may substitute this regularly repeated religious ceremony, which by its very nature is separated from normal living at home and in the work place, for the simplicity of the Lord. His is a lovely, simple way provided to frequently remind us of His perpetual presence with us and of our privilege to repeatedly draw on the limitless resources of His mercy and grace in times of need.

Partaking of natural food is intended to prompt us to assimilate Living Bread into our inmost being. Only then will the wellsprings of His life touch, flood, inspire and deeply affect our thoughts, desires, affections and intentions. Partaking of Christ, the Living Bread, and remembering Him as being actually present with us and indwelling us through the Holy Spirit wonderfully strengthens our resolve and provides us with divine enablement to glorify Him in what we think, say and do. Didn't Jesus Himself say that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every revelation that comes from the mouth of God?

Eating natural food should prompt us to consume spiritual food as well.

Isn't that probably why four forebears linked "grace" with eating meals? Let's learn to allow mealtimes to remind us to give attention to our need of frequent and regular spiritual sustenance through partaking of the grace of God.

Several tunes in the Gospel of John chapter six Jesus stated, "I am the bread of life." He also said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven."

We could well ponder His pronouncement in verse 57, "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

Stay for Lunch

On occasion in the United States of America, people have enquired, "Will you break bread with us?" By this they were simply asking if we would stay for lunch. I am convinced that the term has the same meaning in Scripture. This is clearly demonstrated in Acts 27:34-36:

"Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." *After he [Paul] said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.*

Breaking bread was normal in everyday eating, bread knives or sliced bread not being heard of in Bible times.

Nothing to Say

A good friend once asked for help in making the breaking of bread more meaningful. My reply was, "Just note that Jesus didn't give us anything to say. He doesn't teach us, '*Say this,*' but '*Do this.*'" "Our friend came to believe that Jesus' request, "*Do this in remembrance of Me,*" was a call for us to be broken bread in the laying down of our lives for Christ's sake and the gospel's.

This thought of doing rather than saying should indicate to us that most Christians have become accustomed to some form of communion service which is based on tradition more than on Scripture. It is usually based more on a sentimental dwelling on the cross than on linking the benefits of the atonement with His presence now and His helpfulness in daily living.

Let us be deeply and continually grateful for what the Lord Jesus Christ suffered on the cross and for His provision of eternal salvation. At the same time, let us dare to live an adventurous lifestyle in which the natural and spiritual dimensions of life are integrated and blended together rather than kept in separate compartments. If we fail in this blending, then one area of life will be falsely religious and the other a struggle and failure, lived without a moment by moment drawing on God's grace.

"Second Generationism"

In some circles there has been discussion in recent years about the danger of second generationism. The thought intended concerns situations in which a generation or two ago people broke out of the mold of their traditional levels of Christian experience and church

practice. Many times they paid quite a price for venturing beyond what others considered the acceptable norm.

That kind of "ignore the cost" responding to the Holy Spirit brought spiritual rewards in maturity and grace, building extra understanding of drawing on the Lord for His wisdom and strength.

Now children or converts of those who pioneered into newness are accepting things as normal for which their fathers had paid a price. These pioneers are concerned that their children are lacking something of value that has been built into the parents over the years.

The concern may well be an admission that those who were mold breakers have now become mold makers!

Such people need to learn two things. Firstly, we should always be adventuring into new territory, living like Abraham: *"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb. 11:9).*

Can you see that Abraham taught his descendants to be pioneer pilgrims by continuing to be one himself? He didn't settle down and build a city when he entered the new and better land the God had promised him.

The Holy Spirit asked me once, "When will My people learn that every generation needs new wineskins to contain new wine?"

The second thing such people need to learn is that they should set their children free to hear God for themselves and to walk in what they hear. There is a danger in considering that because we have learned many things over the years, our children and converts will be safe if they believe the things we believe and do the things we do.

It simply is not so! The safety for those of every generation lies in clearly hearing the Lord for themselves and in bravely and boldly responding to His call even though it takes them into realms in which their fathers have had no experience.

Isn't it somewhat strange that these days a multitude of quite different church groups claim to be New Testament in character? Who will dare learn from what the early Church was born with and what it was born without? Who will learn to adventurously respond to the Holy Spirit as early believers did, so that in veritable reality Jesus becomes all in all to them? Who will venture into heavenly realms of grace in order that Father may be fully satisfied?

CHAPTER NINE

Where Is It Happening?

A brother in England commented to me that unless I can show a place where what is described in *The Church of My Dreams* is actually happening, he would have to consider me a godly man with an impossible dream. No God-given dream is impossible, of course; but it can understandably seem to be so unless the Holy Spirit witnesses within an individual that what has been revealed, to himself or to someone else, is actually for him in this wonderful present strategic day of promise, opportunity and challenge.

Part of the thrill to me about what I am seeking to share is the knowledge that in many parts of the world there are vibrantly alive, mature believers who are entering into these things. However, I must confess that I wonder a little why some questioners seem to want to see before being willing to believe.

Interestingly, again and again people have related to us how they were totally unaware of anyone else, or any other group, being called by our lovely Lord to walk like this until after they had responded to the Holy Spirit's promptings. I have been asked how I would advise someone who knows no one else who is called as he is, yet who wants to respond to the call of God to walk free of man-made church trappings without becoming a "loner."

What can one say? "We must obey God rather than men." If He is urging us to live in a certain way, we need to trust Him for the grace required in every aspect of that walk. Craving popularity and widespread acceptance can be a snare, but the desire for healthy love relationships in Father's wonderful family is right and proper. Trust Him to supply for your need!

The New Zealand Scene

Twelve couples from New Zealand provided a shared Foreword for the book, *The Church of My Dreams*. Without being too categorical, I would say that at the present time nine of these delightful couples have abandoned routine church-going and involvement in any church structure. Five can be described as having previously been involved in leadership of one or another of three separate fellowships that disbanded on the clear instruction of the Holy Spirit. The rest simply walked away from what they had been involved in when others chose not to respond to God as they were doing.

Let me say this: I earnestly sought the Lord for His choice of who should be asked to write that Foreword. I marvel at His wisdom in directing me to this number of people from different parts of the country. I deeply appreciate the commendation they gave, and am grateful to God for providing us with friends of the caliber of healthy Christian maturity that they manifest. These are not a bunch of misfits and rebels, but humble followers of Christ who have dared to respond to His leading.

A Specific Situation

Throughout New Zealand there are now many, many Christians who identify with the lifestyle described in this book. To be specific, I will comment on the group of believers who have been our home fellowship over recent years. We recently moved to a different part of the

Province, but still feel strong ties of love with our good friends in Fairlie.

The time came when there was unanimous agreement that the Holy Spirit was calling the fellowship beyond decentralization to a full disbanding of its structure. This involved an acceptance that there would be no further gatherings except when there was a calling together by the Lord for a specific purpose. It also meant getting rid of the building the fellowship owned and the closing of its bank account.

Before the commencement of our current overseas journey we revisited Fairlie. Over these several years since the fellowship disbanded, the Christians there have continued to enjoy fellowship with Jesus; indeed, more so than before. Realizing that they must be looking to Him and not to men, drawing on His grace rather than relying on the support of a church system, has increased maturity and enhanced godliness.

These believers haven't backslidden or become worldly. They are joyfully accepting opportunities to share Jesus with unbelievers. They comment that now that the fellowship no longer exists, people who don't know the Lord seem far more friendly and open to listen to the good news of Christ's love.

With them, we too are conscious of being imperfect and inadequate, yet are looking to the Lord Jesus for sufficient understanding so that we may be what He wants us to be right where we are. In these believers there is an honest desire to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly and to see Him wonderfully glorified in the whole area about them.

Beloved Ireland

Ireland is one of the dearest places on earth to us. We are profoundly grateful to God for the precious way in which He has knit our hearts in love with many precious people in that land. On a number of occasions when we have been in some other part of the world they have tracked us down by telephone to share that they were hearing from the Lord about us.

We have been thrilled for Jesus' sake that they have heard so supernaturally clearly and then have reached out in expressive love to stand with us in the need or situation of challenge that we were encountering. We deeply cherish the friendship of these precious ones and repeatedly bless the Lord for having brought us to know them.

In Dublin a strong and healthy fellowship disbanded, forsaking all that had previously been normal and acceptable to them. Even believers who cannot understand what they have done, or who cannot accept the Tightness of it, acknowledge that these are truly quality Christians whose lives are exemplary and whose love for Jesus is marked by sincerity and consistency. I don't have the shadow of a doubt that what these people are, and the way they live for God, is not only very gratifying to our dear Lord Jesus, but that in spiritual dimensions it is also opening the way for a new day to come to Ireland.

In Other Lands

God is always doing ever so much more than we see or hear about. No one can measure what He is doing, though modern churchdom places so much false value on measuring, tabulating and recording what it believes it is achieving, only to proudly compare it with what others have accomplished. Let it be well noted that no one can quantify the activity of God!

Of the little that we personally know of God's activity in the earth, we could share about fellowships that have triumphantly disbanded in South Africa and England, and tell of believers in Australia, Sweden, Zimbabwe and the United States of America who are exploring new fields of freedom and effectiveness in the Spirit.

If the report is true, as we are confident it is, that thousands of vibrantly alive believers in our small homeland of New Zealand have forsaken "normal" church life, then surely there are multiplied thousands around the world.

When asked, "Why have you done it?" friends of ours have simply answered, "Because Jesus asked us to do so, and He is our sovereign Lord."

Can you acknowledge the possibility or feasibility of coming to a place at some stage, as these disciples have, where you either have to abandon your confession of Jesus as Lord or do what He asks of you, even if you have previously considered this step to be unthinkable? Could you, if He asks it, abandon your ties with structured churchdom? Please remember that God's purpose in this is not that we sit in circles feeling smugly superior and praising the Lord for having brought us out! His purpose is that He be glorified in His Church as we all move freely and unencumbered into a godly and attractive lifestyle, magnifying Him in all the earth.

CHAPTER TEN

Who Is Forsaking Assembling?

On a number of occasions people who have read *The Church of My Dreams*, or who have otherwise come to know about the lifestyle it depicts, have asked about the Scripture which says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

I am grateful for the insight to this verse that Rick Joyner gives in his book, *The Harvest*. He views it as a statement about unity—not simply meeting, but meeting together. Thus, if you with your brand of "church" meet in a building on one corner of an intersection, and others meet on another corner with their brand of "church," you have abandoned the assembling of yourselves together.

In other words, this biblical statement is a challenge to all of us to break free from sectarianism. By extension it is therefore also a warning against the elevation of doctrinal philosophies to a place where members of the family are divided. This means that it is also a call to high quality brotherly forbearance and love. Isn't that what Jesus gave priority to, indeed, commanded? We are required to love one another in the same manner and to the same degree that Christ loves us. If you consider that to be impossible, please note that it is commanded of us. God never commands the impossible.

The Scripture quoted above (Heb. 10:25) does not say that we need to be increasingly encouraging one another to faithfully attend meetings! The verse prior to it calls for consideration of how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Encouragement in these things can come forth more effectively if less of our energy and time is absorbed with endlessly continuing a program, maintaining or improving a building and providing for the financial support for our "club" and its full-tune staff.

An elder of a fellowship in the United States once told me in front of the others, "John, the Lord is calling me to full-time work, but these brothers can't see it!"

My reply may surprise you: "Brother, don't tell me about that, because I don't understand what you are talking about."

When pressed a little further, I added, "I simply do not believe that Father calls people to full-time work! He calls us all to various functions, and where a calling becomes incompatible with one's secular employment He may release us from it. Almost invariably this need arises when a person is called to a translocal traveling ministry."

It is a pleasure to comment that although at that stage the fellowship in question financially supported several men whose time was fully given to ministry, they did not have them on the fixed salary of hirelings.

My contention is not against the people of God meeting together; definitely not! It is a

contention that we should come together in whatever numbers, for whatever purpose, as frequently as the Holy Spirit requests us; nothing more, nothing less.

Regular routine gatherings have proved themselves to be spiritually deadening a million times over and more! There is awful bondage in being trapped into attendance at such meetings because faithfulness in this area has been presented as a part of the "package deal" for acceptance by the Lord. From the time we are first brought to Jesus we are encouraged to regularly "attend church" to please Him as well as for our own edification. This very questionable emphasis has developed in many believers a false sense of obligation and a falsely sensitized conscience.

Don't People Need Teaching?

What a false picture this question presents! I have often asked men in leadership and others as well, "Where does God do most of His teaching?" Brief consideration must surely convince us that it isn't in meetings, but in the norm of life... in the joys and challenges of family life; in confronting our own inner reactions to the pressures of traffic snarls, financial needs and business deadlines; in precious times of quiet thoughtful-ness at the fireside or while strolling amid the beauty of God's wonderful creation.

While not denying that there may be valuable times of learning through someone's sharing of the Word of God, we would point out that somehow or other present church life has produced a generation of master theoreticians. This is not hastening the coming of the Kingdom of God!

Precious lessons that directly relate to practical godly living may be shared and imparted in the informality and interaction of two or three sharing their hearts as they pass on what they have been receiving from the Lord, as Paul always seemed eager to do. When the Holy Spirit is the Teacher, there is no need to endeavor to pressure a congregation to conform to our current position and understanding on some aspect of biblical interpretation.

Those I know who have abandoned traditional church life have most definitely not given up meeting together! Frequently there is a blending of informal fellowship with sharing on a spiritual level. In fact, one of the lovely aspects of this new lifestyle is the integration of all the various facets of normal living. No longer is there the clear demarcation there once was between special times of spiritual awareness and activity on one hand, and the rest of life on the other. How healthy, liberating and uplifting it is to discover how to be alive, aware and alert in the Spirit while engaged in the routine activities of life.

Although there is a joining and sharing with others as frequently as the Spirit desires, probably the major change is that neither meetings nor leaders are looked to for counsel and support to the degree they previously had been. People are learning to hear God for themselves without a human mediator between God and man!

A brother whom I love and honor told me that in then-fellowship in the United States he made an announcement to the people one Sunday: If they were attending the service because of any pressure he may have unwittingly placed upon them, or merely out of a sense of duty and loyalty to him, he wished to apologize and set them free to attend or not the next Sunday morning solely on the basis of whether they felt the Holy Spirit was impressing on

them to do so or not. I must confess to my surprise that only about a third of them failed to turn up the following week!

What About Meaningful Worship?

In the past some of us have been deeply thrilled and blessed in sharing the privilege of exalting the Lord in freedom and fullness with others who love Him. We have known seasons when it was virtually commonplace for the Holy Spirit to move among us with spine-tingling awareness. In times like this we have been repeatedly amazed at the way many among us were born again, supernaturally healed or baptized in the Holy Spirit, when neither they nor we were seeking anything else but to glorify the Lord with wholehearted expressions of love.

Songs of adoration have flowed from deeply touched hearts, love songs in the spirit have come forth in fuller expression of our devotion to Jesus, and heaven and the Lord Jesus Himself have been more real to us than people and earth, as everything else has faded into nothingness "in the light of His glory and grace." What cherished and unparalleled experiences we have known in song and in silence as divine love seems to have flooded every part of our being and the actual presence of our dear Lord Jesus has filled us with wonder and awe!

In many places there is now evidence that, although leaders are trying strenuously to maintain the blessing in worship that was known in former years, the sweet perfume of those former trysts is absent to a large degree. One reason for this is that value has been placed on the outward form of those days which was never intended to remain static. Using the same kind of song or the same flow of tempo or thought, copying the same bodily posture or seeking greater excellence in musical composition will not accomplish anything. Keeping at it longer or introducing new methods won't, either!

Over these recent years God has been very gracious to us, in spite of which we have given a sadly limited connotation to the word "worship." Worship is not a particular style of song, the use of certain words of endearment and love, nor indeed is it anything of outward style or expression. Worship is a love flow from the heart!

Today worship leaders have learned to create soulful moods which appear to be similar to some of the feelings experienced in past times of worship. To some these feelings even actually mean that they are experiencing the mystical "Presence" of the Lord, but there can be deception in that.

The very term "worship leader" bothers me. We need to make it very plain: Only the Holy Spirit can orchestrate and bring forth true expressions of love from the hearts of God's people.

Today Father is calling for what may be termed "integrated worship." By this I mean that everything we do and say throughout our day ought to have a content of love for the Lord which can come to Him as a vital act of worship.

Whatever is done in gatherings in this regard has no more value to the Lord than the attitudes we have at work and in the home. Whenever we do join others in blessing our

precious Lord, it should be because we are worshipers, not simply because we have come together to worship.

Believers who have broken man-made church ties and have forsaken routine church gatherings are discovering a new reality in maintaining their love life with Jesus. In this new lifestyle this is actually imperative. Happily, at the heart of this way of life is the blessed necessity of consistently hearing and responding to the Holy Spirit. So we are hearing and responding to Him in maturing into a continually fresh and ultimate love relationship with our dearest Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

What Place Has God-Given Leadership?

Can you tell me why it is usually leaders who ask this question?

It is a valid concern, of course, and I am delighted to respond to the enquiry.

The election, appointment or ordination of men to official positions is extremely difficult to justify using the New Testament, though clear reference is made to special leadership functions. Since I have expounded on the intended true nature of Christian leadership in *The Church of My Dreams*, we will not dwell on that now.

My friends in Fairlie laid down their office of eldership entirely. Their desire from that time forward was simply to love Jesus with their whole heart and to respond to even the gentlest promptings of the Holy Spirit, free from any conflict with self-imposed or fellowship-imposed obligations.

Ideally, how do we come to recognize elders in the first place? Surely it is that as men have walked with love toward the Lord Jesus and in sensitive responsive-ness to the Holy Spirit, others have noticed that they have had a caring concern for various members of

Father's flock. In other words, we simply acknowledge that Father has already been leading them in that direction.

How will they best carry out the uniqueness and fullness of their particular function? That will come as they continue to walk as they have before, not trying to fulfill the role of elder, but endeavoring to please the Lord in everything.

My conviction is that men do not become better elders by trying to be, nor by having to perform the duties church custom has dictated to be their realm of responsibility. In situations where routine church activity has been laid to rest, we have discerned no lack of shepherding care. At the same time, people have found the way to look to and rely on the Lord for themselves rather than continually looking to an elder or pastor as the middle man between them and God. The present situation in Fairlie is an example of this.

As we are directed by the Holy Spirit as to when to spend time with a person, and have been given understanding of what to share or what to ask, the effect can be remarkable. When we are eager to be led by the Spirit to bring encouragement and inspiration to our brothers and sisters, God in His grace frequently prompts us to do so. He also provides ideal opportunities and gives precious revelation of the best and highest way to share His life and His love.

Time Available

Since we are not involved in routine activity at the call of men and systems, the old pressures of time and conflicting responsibilities is gone. This leaves ample time to give ourselves to all that Father desires of us.

We have been asked how disciplinary action can be taken in this context. The short answer is: Excellently. There is often a greater appreciation of and openness toward men who seek to bring wise and loving corrective input when it is obvious that this is not done on behalf of a church system, but on behalf of the Lord and out of deep personal concern for the individual. There is no discernible lack of authority, but more of it is God's and less of it is man's!

An open and somewhat blunt, as well as loving and caring, honesty is discernible among believers who have set their hearts to honor the Lord in every thing and who don't have to keep the peace at any price lest they offend someone and drive him away from a particular local church. There is more value than we may realize in coming to a place where brothers and sisters care enough about us to confront us with true and honest love, yet with no thought of judgment or rejection. To be willing even to risk one's own acceptance through loving, yet frank, sharing of concern for a brother can be a beautiful mark of mature, Christ-like love.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

At the heart of what this chapter contains thus far is the question of the proper function of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. Do we lack anything by not having the kind of meetings where such expressions come forth? Certainly not!

Isn't it true that the norm in recent years has been for gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as healings and various revelations, to take place in organized meetings? This was certainly not so in the early Church! We would do well to note that the linking of gifts with meetings very frequently acts as a straitjacket, severely restricting our understanding of the nature, purpose and dynamic quality of the lovely gifts the Holy Spirit bestows.

If we are not very careful, we will simply consider these amazing blessings as Father's provision to satisfy our petty needs and our selfish desire for life to always be pleasant, comfortable and easy. Surely we can recognize the way in which the Lord will be glorified when unbelievers observe God in action in a supernatural way, uncluttered by trite religious expression or man-centered activity.

Today some are learning how to move in the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life. We gladly testify to the fact that He frequently operates through us with, for example, wisdom and knowledge that has no natural or human basis whatsoever. We trust Him, count on Him and expect Him to move!

The lovely way in which the Lord Jesus becomes the center of attention, and is wonderfully glorified thereby, is especially sweet when gifts of the Spirit come forth unexpectedly (so to speak) as one is seeking to be a friend of sinners, as Jesus was. In the New Testament Church these manifestations of God's wisdom, knowledge and power took place, at least in the man, on the street, in the market place or in someone's home. May that become the norm again in this present day, for Jesus' sake!

The Place of Apostles

Thank God that He is restoring ascension gift ministries to His Church in our day! Jesus is our great Apostle, and any true apostolic function is the release of a part of Jesus' life to the Body of Christ. Accordingly, it will manifest the pure love, gentleness and servant heart of our precious Savior.

For years my personal concern in this area has been, not simply that such ministries be restored to the Church, but that they be restored with a very high caliber of Christ-likeness. Sadly, this isn't always so.

There are situations where the title of apostle is given to or claimed by men whose function is no different from that of a denominational bishop or superintendent.

By this I mean that they assume the right to control and dictate to individuals and fellowships as though they were their lord and not their servant.

We do well to recall the words of Jesus: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:25-28).

True apostles—that is, those with the heart attitude of Jesus—will have no difficulty in identifying and flowing with this new, unfettered form of church life.

The Danger of Human Control

We have been asked on occasion whether there isn't as much danger of men with natural strength and leadership drive controlling what the questioners have described as "this new move" as has always seemed to spoil other movings of God.

There is always a danger of people wanting to rule people, which none of us has a divine mandate to do. But this "new move" has a unique built-in characteristic: Wherever a person or group is controlled by someone, then by definition they are not part of what God is doing in this way.

At the heart of what we are sharing is both an acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord and an acceptance of what He has always intended, that He chooses to speak directly to the inner heart of His followers concerning every aspect of their lives. We unreservedly endorse each other's privilege to respond to the promptings each one receives from the Holy Spirit. We know that He may be calling others to take steps that He is not asking of us at present.

The greater danger, I believe, is within the hearts of people who are enjoying their love walk with Jesus and the new release that has come to them. We can easily become careless and coast along without eagerly reaching out for the Holy Spirit's leading into the "much more yet" that Father always has for us.

There is always danger that any of us, regardless of our situation, may become smugly content with what we have already experienced of Father's wonderful love. I suspect and

hope that this book will be as much of a challenge to those who have already moved away from church traditions as to those still clinging to them. Perhaps more so!

CHAPTER TWELVE

Prophets in the New Land

There is great interest in the ministry of prophets these days. Many questions are being asked concerning the whole realm of prophetic revelation.

One of my foremost desires in recent years has been that God would sovereignly raise up prophets in every part of the world who would fearlessly declare the word of the Lord with unmistakable clarity, rugged honesty, pristine purity and amazing anointing. We need that! I am persuaded that we will never see the fullness of other ascension gift ministries until the fresh winds of heaven blow upon what is emerging of them through the ministry of mature prophets who spend much more time with God than they do among men.

The quality of prophetic ministry thus described is currently scarce on the earth. Too often what comes forth is tainted by the vessel's own doctrinal prejudices, tinged with his natural sentiments or marred by the earthiness of a less than fully crucified self life.

Believers who show promise of this kind of gifting are often placed in a box by well-meaning people who expect them to prophesy about anything and everything, virtually every time there is a gathering of believers. Prophesying too frequently tends to make the prophet a man-pleaser and normally brings shallowness to what is expressed.

Beyond that, in some situations, either the emerging prophets themselves or those associated with them have such a limited understanding of this calling that it is linked to the professionalism of being part of the ministry team of some group or other. At times they then become involved in the routine activities of a human system to the detriment of the call of God upon them. The prophetic ministry is never given to support the status quo, much less to support the systems of men's church organizations!

Let the People Judge

In the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, we read that God spoke to the people whom He had brought out of Egypt and redeemed from the land of slavery, the people He had led into the land He had promised to them. He told them that a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, may appear among them and announce to them a miraculous sign or wonder. The sign or wonder of which he has spoken may occur exactly as he has foretold, yet the people may need to stone him to death! Today we hear people comment, "You have to accept his word and acknowledge that he is a prophet in truth, because what he declared has taken place." On the basis of this Scripture, this is not necessarily so!

The reason the Lord cautioned His people to be alert at that time is that He is very jealous. He feared that such a prophet would turn people away from Him to follow other gods. "Surely," you may say, "there is no danger of that with the prophets God is raising up today." I wish we could be so certain!

To recapitulate: What a man declares may be revealed truth. That is not enough. What he

foretells may actually occur. That is not sufficient, either! Even if signs and wonders accompany the prophetic declaration that may not be adequate, from Father's perspective. Quite challenging, isn't it?

Any person who speaks for God or who leads the people of God in some way may turn their hearts from the sweet purity of loving God with all their hearts and minds. This happens when eyes are turned toward the development of their ministry or the success of their group, rather than toward the Lord and His glory.

Let's beware of men who draw attention to themselves, their ministry, and their doctrinal points of view. Let's be very cautious of men who are developing a program, scheme or organization, especially when it centers around them or when they are involved in its leadership. This particularly concerns those with a prophetic gifting, but applies equally well to others.

Let's beware of men whose demeanor shows that they feel a sense of importance because of what Father entrusts to them. Let's beware if they don't clearly show, with transparent honesty, that they know full well they are merely channels of divine grace and that the credit for whatever is accomplished through them belongs to God alone. Historically, prophets have brought sharp focus to what God says, and wonderful glory to Him. It must be so today!

We ourselves need to take great care that our focus is never on healing, but always on the Healer; never on the baptism, but always on the Baptizer; never on the blessing, but always on the Blessor; never on the revelation, but always on the Revealer; never on experiences, but always on the Lord.

Our focus should always be much more on the God of all grace than on the vessels through whom that grace flows. Let us keep our hearts and minds fixed on the Lord Jesus Himself, with grateful appreciation for the life-flow of His blessing. We never dare be content because some ministry is kept within the supposed safety of orthodoxy and the wide acceptance of men. We need to eagerly trust the Lord for a new day in which each person who speaks for the Lord does so not only with boldness, but with wonderful anointing and God-glorifying selflessness.

Popular Prophets

One night during our last visit to the United States of America, I found myself burdened before the Lord concerning the raising up of prophetic ministries. At some hour in the early morning this phrase captivated my attention: Popular prophets. The very term breathes a warning, doesn't it, and seems to virtually declare by definition that something is out of order?

As I waited on the Lord some things became clear to me. I have noted, as you may have, that when some men with prophetic ministry visit a fellowship they prophesy in a certain manner to those in leadership.

In one way or another they prophesy greater recognition of ministry. This is often through "the work" meeting with great success...if added numbers, increased finances and enlarged

buildings mean success. It often involves becoming an international ministry, almost as though visiting other lands puts a preacher on a higher plane. It also very often includes greater power and effectiveness. Unspoken but indicated is the message that the leader will become very popular and successful...in the ways the world measures success.

In response to this, local leaders praise the ministry of the visiting prophet, bringing him greater recognition as well. The world describes this kind of thing as, "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours."

On one occasion when Jesus began to teach in the Temple courts, the Jews were amazed and asked, "*How did this Man get such learning without having studied?*"

Jesus took no credit for it but told them, "*My teaching is not my own [in origin]. It comes from him who sent me*" (John 7:16). That is a noteworthy example to follow.

Jesus went beyond that, however, to declare that anyone who speaks on his own ["From himself as a source," Wuest translates it] does so to gain honor or greater recognition for himself. Anyone tempted to seek or hungrily accept such recognition needs to note again the wisdom of Gamaliel: "*If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God*" (Acts 5:38-39).

We once shared enjoyable fellowship with a fine brother with an emerging prophetic ministry. At one stage during the meal I enquired, "May I prophesy to the prophet?"

When he agreed I declared, " 'I give you a choice,' says the Lord. 'Either make yourself of no reputation, or I will.' "

The apostle Paul was inspired to write, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... [he] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.. .he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*" (Phil. 2:5-8).

I foresee the day when it will be normal for God's people to maintain such a sweet, fresh love walk with Jesus, and be sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit, that they will wholeheartedly receive messengers of God by discerning the spirit in which they come. This is already happening with greater frequency than in the recent past.

Today's gullibility will not last forever! Increasingly Father will reveal the hearts of His people to one another. They will come to know with supernatural certainty of exactly what is, and what is not, the word of the Lord for them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Question of Evangelism

There is value in answering sincere questions, yet a danger as well. If care isn't taken, the entire process can simply further our customary reliance on intellectual understanding and agreement. Every one of us needs to hear God for himself. An ounce of revelation carries more weight in the Kingdom of God than a ton of explanation! Therefore, as further questions are examined, you are urged to have your ear tuned continually toward the Holy Spirit of revelation and truth.

Concern for Lost People

A sad aspect of the blessings of the renewal and restoration that have taken place in recent decades is that only a very limited impact has been made on the world of sinners who are without God and without hope in the world. And God does love sinners so very much! There is such temptation to become introverted and self-satisfied.

Years ago I was told of a bold and daring sergeant in the Second World War. His exploits brought well-deserved decorations for bravery. But when he was back from the front line for rest and recreation, he always felt he had some ailment or other, turning up on sick parade morning after morning. The medics soon recognized him for the malingerer that he was. What a strange combination: a hero who was a malingerer. Yet when the sergeant was doing what he was trained and equipped for, he was in perfect health.

In many a home group or fellowship attention seems to be endlessly turned to the needs people have, so they may be encouraged, counseled and prayed for. Churches that overemphasize healing actually cause sickness by focusing people's thoughts and attention on their bodies. In this introverted, substandard Christianity there can never be the quality of Christian experience that there could be if we forgot our minor aches and pains and became absorbed in Jesus' love and grace. Like the sergeant, we need to be involved in what we have been called to and equipped for!

Sharing Jesus' Love

Every believer must learn how to be a friend of sinners if he wishes to be like Jesus. We also need to discover how to be a witness to God's amazing love. The early Church was a witnessing Church. Let me quote from my small book, *Open Windows*.

Can you see that we need to have open windows toward our fellow man as well? In fact, unless we do provide opportunity for others to become conscious of the wonderful difference Jesus makes in our lives, they will have much less opportunity of discovering this blessed secret of life for themselves. The Lord Jesus Himself instructs us to let our light shine before men. We are to be like a lamp on its stand that gives light to everyone in the house so that they may see our good works and praise our Father in heaven. (See Matthew 5:14-16.)

In Psalm 67 David shares that when all the people praise God, the land yields its harvest,

God blesses us, and the ends of the earth will fear Him.

What does it mean to praise God? David praised God for specified blessing. To praise God is to give Him the credit that He deserves for the good things He does for us. Paul told the believers at Colossae that the gospel was bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it had been doing among them since the day they heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Since God's grace is His active, beneficial involvement in our lives, we need to give Him the credit for that activity so that people who don't yet know Him may recognize the wonderful difference He makes to us. Can you see that?

When someone compliments you because of a promotion, or because of your success in an examination, who gets the credit?

When someone expresses appreciation for your thoughtfulness, or kind helpfulness, who gets the credit?

When people comment on the way you have maintained a restful spirit when coping with adversity or loss, who gets the credit?

When people admire your new car or house, who gets the credit?

If we remain silent at men's words we take the credit to ourselves and rob God of it. How tragic if, because of that, even one person is deprived of the privilege of gaining insight into Father's love! But how very wonderful if, because of our giving credit to God, some work associate or neighbor reaches out for God's grace in his personal salvation.

Evangelism

Much of modern evangelistic activity would be incongruous in the church lifestyle depicted in this book. It would also have been in the early Church, of course! It should be noted well, therefore, that the early Church was primarily a witnessing Church rather than an evangelistic Church. We may only see the fullness of New Testament evangelism when we have become a people with a way of living that is truly attractive and appealing to unbelievers. We must become witnesses to Father's wonderful grace to such an extent that men no longer see our good works and, because of our silence, glorify us instead of Him.

In honesty, we would all surely admit that modern evangelism hasn't been so effective that we could consider it to be Father's best or only plan to bring people to Christ. Can you accept the idea that part of today's less-than-ideal church life is our leaving to professional ministries the tasks we should be undertaking ourselves?

It is possible that today's "normal" evangelistic efforts will only continue to achieve as much as they do until we more clearly understand the way of the Lord and walk in that. What a day it will be when all the ends of the earth fear God because His people faithfully and repeatedly give Him all the credit for all of His grace!

Social Concern and Social Action

The forefront of active involvement in ministering to the multitude of social needs found

in modern society (among people free from the trappings of religious tradition) is found in their eager desire to respond to every prompting of the Holy Spirit. This ardent sensitivity to God the Spirit is rooted in a carefully guarded priority of devotion to Jesus. Nothing dare diminish or conflict with that.

When Jesus is the magnificent obsession of our lives, our love for Him overflows to others as an extension and expression of our love for Him. A consequence of that is a growing alertness to respond to the Holy Spirit rather than to the needs of people. There is God-glorifying, fruitful effectiveness in the one that is absent in the other.

It is always a challenge for us to trust Father in both the things we are directed to be involved in and also in areas of which we are aware, yet have received no instructions about.

One of the reasons some respond to need rather than to God is that they cannot seem to trust Him to handle a situation without them. Therefore, some sincere and good activity is the result of unbelief; and whatever is not of faith is sin. Think about that!

Strong Persuaders and Old Snares

We should always be willing to hear others share about concerns that God has particularly given to them. But we should understand that nobody has the right to pressure us to become involved in their vision and activity. Reject the pressure of men! We have often seen people burdened beneath the load of having been harangued, pressured or shamed into active involvement in somebody else's vision and ministry.

Perhaps because such things are very common occurrences, we have been asked whether it is possible that any new walk of freedom can long stay free from the domination of strong men who assume the right to declare themselves leaders. Such men quickly proceed to take a place of control over others which they have no earthly or heavenly right to take.

Linked with that is another set of questions: "Since the best of people and the best of church groups have eventually been trapped into staleness, routine activity and dependence on human leadership, isn't it futile to expect any fresh adventure to end up any differently? If that is so, don't the people end up being just like the group they left? Isn't it therefore foolish to go through the upheaval of leaving where we are?"

These are areas in which we need to be continually watchful. If "Eternal vigilance is the price of a nation's safety," then it is no less true that eternal vigilance is required for safety and vibrant health in the Church of God.

The Way of Escape

Can we escape the pitfalls that have ensnared others? I believe we can! How? Part of the answer lies in our returning to the simplicity that is in Jesus and forsaking the vain philosophies of men.

One essential for continual freedom, freshness, fire and overflow is in guarding with great jealousy the centrality of Jesus in our lives. The only motivation strong enough to enable us to walk in purity and grace all the days of our lives is an all-consuming, continuous and wholehearted devotion to Jesus.

I plead with you never to allow anything to dampen the fervor and enthusiasm of your love for Jesus. Love Him with your whole heart. Love Him with your whole mind. Love Him with every fiber of your being! Love Him so deeply that you see the hardest task as a high privilege. Love Him so passionately that the highest place of popularity, acclaim and honor that man can offer you seems as dung if it detracts in any way from your love walk with Jesus. See Him as the altogether lovely One, as the fairest of the fair, and as the most magnificent and glorious Lover and King that He truly is.

If we fear God sufficiently we won't fear men too much; if we hear God clearly enough we won't hear men too clearly; if we follow Jesus with total commitment we will not become slaves to the whims of men. If we keep on loving Jesus with all of our hearts, we need not lose the newness and freshness into which we are adventuring.

A further necessary safeguard from reversion to custom and law is in the clear hearing of and eager response to the Holy Spirit. Church history, both modern and ancient, teaches that an emphasis on past revelation causes present bondage. Ongoing revelation is essential if we are to enjoy heaven's limitless variety. It is also necessary if we are going to continue to place the soles of our feet on further portions of the land of promise we have entered.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Who Controls Finances?

Mary and I are convinced believers in the words of the godly missionary statesman, Hudson Taylor: "God's work done in God's way never lacks God's supply." We can testify from years of experience to the truth of his statement.

We have proved that God is absolutely trustworthy. We have been able to trust Him for the provision for any lack that we may have. This includes trusting Him sufficiently that we need not continually inform other believers that we solely rely on the God of all grace for the supply of every need. Bless the Lord, He is totally reliable!

We are deeply grateful to many people in many places for their wonderful generosity to us. Many times a gift has arrived at a strategic moment of need when there appeared to be no earthly way to meet an obligation. This has been because some dear brother or sister has responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we see clearly that they are simply the channels of the supply that we receive, but God alone is the Source. So we confidently rest in Him.

Stewardship

We have been asked, "What happens to the tithes?" Money is needed in many areas, and dedicated giving to God is a normal part of Christian commitment. It is the standard teaching and custom for tithes to be paid into the local church to be dispensed according to the instructions of whatever formal leadership structure a denomination or local church may have.

I cannot fathom how we have ever dared to believe and teach that giving to maintain and further church buildings, programs and ministries is identical to giving to God. Nor do I feel comfortable with the implication involved, that church leadership always has the mind of Christ on the matter.

New Testament revelation places giving on a different level than the legalistic requirement that 10% of our income be given to the Lord. Believers having an understanding of God's heart know that His amazing and inexhaustible love desires and requires that our love response to Him be total. On its own, the tithe will never satisfy Him.

There is great blessing and freedom in accepting without reservation the truth that everything that I am and have is the Lord's. Nothing we have is unconditionally ours; it is simply entrusted to our care. How wise the believer who freely and fully acknowledges this fact! Father reserves to Himself the right to order the distribution and use of all that is His, but which He has entrusted to us.

If our devotion and commitment to the Lord is what it should be, we will gladly follow His

instructions concerning our first and last dollar, and every dollar in between. Surely this should bring us to a wonderful place of rest because of His involvement in this and every other aspect of our lives.

It would seem highly unlikely, wouldn't it, that the glad expression of grateful hearts of love, the sensitive response to the Holy Spirit by those who are eagerly alert to His promptings, would result in lower levels of giving than when giving is done under pressure or a law imposed by church leaders?

A Learning Experience

In the past, receiving particular instruction from the Lord concerning the distribution of a portion of our money has usually been delegated to church leadership. It is my observation that because of that, many of us who are now walking free from what at this stage is falsely considered normal church life need to progress rapidly from infancy to maturity in this aspect of our Christian walk.

Jesus advises His followers not to give ostentatiously, but secretly. He has said that we shouldn't even let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. Father, who sees in secret, will openly reward giving that comes from selfless, loving, obedient people. When Jesus told the rich young ruler to give to the poor, He gave indication of what would become a major area of giving in the early Church. It should still be so today. One may have many questions about this, but there is no doubt that huge sums would be available for distribution if most buildings and professional church staff were recognized as being redundant to the present purposes of God.

Beyond that, in the first century Church, it would seem that believers were directed by the Holy Spirit to give financial support to men whose anointed itinerant ministry obviously warranted it.

To sum up: We can confidently rely on our dear Lord Jesus to supply for every need that we have; we should acknowledge that everything we have is held in trust for the Lord to whom it belongs; and we should be attentive and eager to receive instructions from the Holy Spirit concerning giving to others for the furthering of the Kingdom of God. "God's work done in God's way never lacks God's supply." We all are frequently given the privilege of being channels for that provision.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Family Life

Many questions we are asked involve a desire for keys to a quality Christian family life. For many years we have said that there is need for pragmatism in the raising of Christian children. What is workable in one situation or at one stage may not work out well in a different situation or at a later phase of development and growth. We have also held to the principle that any method or activity used to teach our children should be governed by two things: It must be both meaningful and enjoyable for them. Lacking that, a backlash of resentment or rebellion is possible within a few short years.

When our younger son was probably not more than four or five years old he told me, "Daddy, I love Jesus, but I hate church." In those days I was his pastor! How would you have responded to a statement like that? I simply commented, "I understand that, Roger; I feel like that a bit myself at times. Let's just love Jesus with all our hearts and not worry too much about church."

Sunday morning is frequently a tune of pressure, tension and unhappiness in many families involved in traditional churchdom. It is a great blessing to break free from all of that to enjoy a relaxed and pleasurable time together as a family, especially if the day is suitable for a visit to a park, a walk along the beach somewhere, or a visit to a family of like-minded friends.

Sunday school is no longer held in many places today, even where folk are regularly involved in fellowship gatherings. As in other areas of changing church lifestyle, it is easier to relinquish something than it is to discover a God-provided better alternative. When I look back to my own boyhood Sunday school days I recollect a few areas that were both enjoyable and meaningful.

Let me firstly mention Bible stories. I didn't like the lengthy applications that teachers put on them, but I did enjoy the stories. Wise parents will provide their youngsters with attractive books, audio or video tapes containing Bible stories. Children will read and reread them and will listen repeatedly to these until the stories are deeply embedded in their minds.

One or two of my Sunday school teachers were a fragrant example of quality Christian living. That was invaluable. Thirdly, memorizing Scripture was a pleasant challenge, especially if it was competitive in some way. Time spent with children whose parents held to similar beliefs and standards was likewise valuable to me, though most of the fun was before and after the actual Sunday school sessions. A way can be found to involve these things in our children's lives without tying them to the boredom and religious pressure of routine Sunday school attendance.

Bringing About Right Attitudes

Everyone appreciates and wants to see their children develop healthy attitudes such as thoughtfulness, appreciativeness, kindness, helpfulness, respectfulness and selflessness, including self-giving, creative Christ-likeness and a willingness to share.

Kindness needs to include practical expressions of love. Respect should include the rights and property of others. Sharing ought to include chores, doing without and sharing personal possessions such as toys and games or equipment. Selflessness includes yielding "rights": We've probably all heard a child complain, "He had two!" or "She isn't in bed yet!" While children need to feel that they are equally loved, they ought not to feel that they can claim equality in every aspect of life. In fact, at times wise love forbids it.

Every parent probably has their own idea of the firmness of discipline and the placing and keeping of boundaries. To be consistent is more important than endeavoring to discipline and control our children in exactly the same ways others do.

Just remember this: Your child's understanding of what God is like will be based more on what you are like than anything else!

If you react with impatience at their slowness and imperfection; if you become angry too quickly and discipline your child too severely and too frequently; if you can be persuaded to change your mind and back down from a clear stand you have taken; your child may find it very difficult to enter and enjoy a close relationship with our wonderful, tender, understanding and patient Lord Jesus. Pray for grace, and apologize to your child quickly when your action or reaction has been wrong.

The Power of Encouragement

Children can be inspired by encouragement. There's nothing comparable to it for effectiveness in training youngsters and in developing right attitudes in them.

Showing pleasure, appreciation, emotion and pride are powerful ways of giving encouragement. Never tire of thanking your children for even the tiniest attitude of love. Join them repeatedly in thanking God for His active love to us all. This will help a child to understand that you consider Jesus to be a very special and wonderful Member of the family.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Parents can exemplify the joy of giving and involve their children in it. For example, if you take flowers or cakes to an elderly or ill neighbor, encourage your child to draw a picture or make a card, and have him come with you. Children will observe, though you may well underline it, the joy that is given and the inward blessing of joy that is felt on such an occasion. Why not comment to a child afterward, "I feel A very young child may very sincerely and meaningfully open his life to the Lord Jesus.

Let me draw a picture of that young life as a small cottage. Other rooms will be added on as the child grows. There will be a room for his school life and one for his financial life, there will also be rooms for his vocational life, sexual life and so on.

As the youngster matures we will want to encourage in opening up of each new room to Jesus as well. This is not intended to refer to his eternal salvation, of course, but to his allowing Jesus to be Lord in every part of his present life.

It's Fun to Be a Helper!

If we want to encourage beautiful attitudes in our children, we will proudly honour them more for that kind of development than for scholastic and athletic achievements. Some Christian parents unwittingly teach that winning in competition against one's contemporaries is in some way more valuable than having a Christ-like spirit.

One of the slogans in our home when our children were young was, "It's fun to be a helper." To be a helper should mean doing things with a parent more than doing things for a parent (though that is included, of course). Being a helper is an opportunity of learning that it really is more blessed to give than to receive.

Good friends of ours in Ireland shared with us and others that whenever they disciplined their active, strong-willed son for not sharing a toy he became intensely angry. If we have taught our child that his toys are unconditionally his, do we have a right to order him to share them? We suggested that perhaps the best toy yet could be bought and given to their son on the condition that he always shares it freely with others.

This actually takes us to a deeper area for instruction. A child is probably never too young to be taught that everything he has, everything his parents have, is held on trust from the Lord, who is the actual Owner....as He is of our very lives, of course.

Express appreciation, compliment freely and show obvious pleasure at every tender shoot of self-giving Christ-likeness in your child! There is no better way to stimulate the desire for and a sense of the value of right attitudes. This is true for every child, every husband, every wife and everyone else as well, Christian or non-believer.

Your Word—Keep It!

The time will come when your child's spiritual life, and even his physical life, may depend on his solid-rock confidence that something must be true because you said so. Years ago I read that John Wesley once mistakenly told a widow of a prayer meeting to be held on a Thursday evening. After traveling several hours on horseback from her house, he arrived at his destination. By then evening was approaching and snow was beginning to fall.

When his hosts mentioned that the gathering was actually on Wednesday evening, Wesley, weary though he was, remounted his horse and returned to apologize to the widow for having given the wrong information. There was a man whose word could be relied on!

Many of us are too rapid and rash in making categorical statements. Being slower to be so definite could save us from many a quandary. For example, your child may ask if he can go to the park with a friend. You may feel that it is a little late in the day for that, or perhaps be unsure of the safety of it. Before giving a definite "No," what about asking, "Why do you want to go at this stage of the day?" It is possible that your child knows that his friend's daddy was involved in an accident at work that day, or that his friend's puppy was lost.

In other words, your child may want to do something friendly and kind. In that case you would be able to come up with an alternative, such as visiting the daddy together, or having the friend over to your home for the evening.

If the illustration isn't ideal, at least try to get the idea of what I am endeavoring to promote. Be slower with your yes or your no, but try to stick with your word once you've given it. If you have agreed to meet your child somewhere at a certain time, be punctual, no matter how inconvenient it may since have become to keep your promise.

Do you teach your child nonverbally, but very efficiently, to whine, cry, shout, beg, throw tantrums or play one parent off against another? Many Christian parents do. Remember that Jesus said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matt. 5:37).

The Place for Discipline

Mealtimes ought to be pleasant times of relaxed family fellowship. If it is felt necessary for these occasions to be used for teaching social graces, parents should be careful that this is done with tact and encouragement.

In the home in which I grew up, mealtimes were often times of fear and tension. In mature adult years most of our family have developed serious medical problems of one kind or another linked to the digestive tract. I am convinced that there is a direct relationship between these two facts.

It distresses me to see parents link corporal punishment with mealtimes. Similarly, wise parents will want bedtime to be something a child looks forward to as a pleasant ending to his day. How can it be so when parents threaten their children? "If you don't behave yourself I'll send you to bed!"

May I suggest that if we are displeased with a child and believe that punishment is required, we find a way to link the punishment with a neutral time and place, even if it requires delaying speaking with the child and applying discipline?

Have you heard parents say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you"? If you use that phrase, I suggest that you alter it to explain that it hurts you on the inside more than it hurts the child on the outside.

Peer Pressure

These days our youngsters face peer pressure that can be quite intense and difficult to cope with. Bear in mind that there can be positive values learned from pressure, even for us as adults. Peer pressure can be used by the Holy Spirit to make children strong, cause them to reach out to the Lord for help and to knit the family more closely together.

Our children need repeated fellowship with other good youngsters. When a child is enduring difficulty at school, the load can seem lighter if he is encouraged to look forward to having a Christian friend visit for the weekend, or to doing something especially nice with the family. In addition to that, there is wisdom in planning well ahead of time for your child to spend a week of the school vacation with a healthy Christian family you know.

As for all of us, there is great value for children in the anticipation of something nice that lies ahead. Encourage a pleasant looking forward to special things both near at hand and also a little further off.

I have come to treasure the statement of a father whose son was in desperate need. He

approached Jesus, saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son." It is lovely to link that request with James' assurance: *"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."* When our children see that we are seeking the Lord and trusting Him for grace on their behalf, it adds to their confidence and strength.

Roles

Many a parent has felt himself to be inferior and a failure because he has compared his parenthood with that of others. Parents may also compare what they are with what they have been taught is ideal.

Let me assure you that none of us are perfect. As long as we are eager to be the best that we can be, we can look to the Lord for grace to compensate for our weakness and insufficiency. If we are doing the best we know how, we can maintain a peaceful confidence that Father requires no more than that.

There is uniqueness in the way in which Father has equipped each of us for life's challenges, and we cannot be exactly the same as anyone else. Our particular role must be revealed to us by the Lord, not imposed on us by others or by ourselves. Let the Holy Spirit show you the kind of person He purposes and equips you to be, and look to Him to lead you step by step in fulfilling what He reveals to you.

There is health for all of us, single or married, parents or not, in having a heart of undivided devotion to the Lord, and in avoiding both self-centeredness and self-pity. Let us all have an attitude in life in which we want to bless others more than to be blessed. Even more than that, may we bless the Lord by living in a quiet, caring, encouraging and trustful manner.

A Final Thought

When one of our sons was a little boy in Sunday school, he came home with a joyful glint in his eye and commented to me, "Daddy, you are my brother!"

"Yes, I am," I replied, "But I am still your dad as well."

Think about your child being your brother or sister in the Lord! Why not involve them in what is often considered adult conversation and ask them questions such as, "Susan, what lovely thing has our precious Lord Jesus been sharing with you this week?" "Charles, in what extra nice way did our wonderful Lord help you during the weekend?" "Andrew, do you have a fresh idea about how we can make today a special day for Jesus?"

Father does speak to little children and draw sweet love responses from them. At times it is healthy for them to see how much we treasure being His children as well, and that we enjoy doing what He wants of us more than doing what we would have chosen for ourselves.

Paul said, *"You follow me as I follow Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1). Don't forget that the best thing you can do as a parent is to love and joyfully follow Jesus with your whole heart. Your children will most likely follow you in that. The example of our attitudes in life and of our selfless love for the Lord Jesus will be an infinitely better heritage than wealth or fame.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

'Holding Fast to the Head'

Jesus Christ is Head of the Church and Lord over all. No Christian would deny that in word or belief, but the actions of many may be a declaration to the contrary. Have you heard Him saying about the Church, "It will be My way, or no way"? He is the Head, and that is His right!

We cannot choose our own lifestyle, nor can we have the Church the way we want it. We should not hold fast to the ways to which we are accustomed, nor to the form that appeals to us most. It is to the great Head of the Church that we are enjoined to hold fast. When He calls for a new step to be taken or instructs us to leave behind something that He previously required as a temporary measure, we should obey with alacrity.

Let us never make permanent what God intends to be transitional, and let us forthrightly refuse to hold on to what He does not currently endorse.

Human Headship

It is vital that we have proper understanding of the headship roles that Father has given us. A comparison of Christ's headship and ours is very illuminating and helpful. Many a wife knows that misunderstanding of his headship role has given a husband the excuse to be a tyrant. Such a man does not know the difference between submission and subjection! The one is by freely exercised choice and the other by forceful imposition, contrary to the ways of God. Every believer, especially church leaders, should also clearly understand this difference.

Many Christians and churches are graphic examples of what happens when someone misunderstands his headship role or loses connection with the Head. Accordingly, we shall consider this, with the following scriptural statements as a basis:

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

First Corinthians 11:3

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 1:22

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Ephesians 5:23

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility disqualify you for the prize. Such a person has lost connection with the Head from whom the whole body, supported and held together

by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. (See Ephesians 4:16.)

The Meaning of Human Headship

Authority is usually viewed as being at the heart of headship. If we see authority as significant, this must be balanced by noting carefully that the Bible teaches that submission is voluntary. Even the Lord Jesus Himself does not demand and force His Church to yield to Him, though He is her Head. He has a higher way, drawing her with tender cords of divine love. It is easy and pleasurable to submit to love like His.

How wise the husband, then, who loves his wife as Christ loves the Church. The corollary to this should be that his wife will find pleasure in responding to his love and yielding to his desires.

Do you accept the idea that every member of the Body of Christ needs a clear understanding of the value of Christ's Headship and of submission to Him alone?

If we see headship as applying only to those in church leadership, we will need to carefully understand the meaning and limitations of biblical leadership. There should be no misunderstanding by men regarding human headship, nor any desire to dominate or control other people. More frequently than we know, we become the victims of psychological pressure clothed with biblical terminology. This may be imposed by group pressure or propounded by church leaders, or both.

Leaders should primarily see that their calling is to be an example of truly Christ-like purity, honesty, reality, sensitivity, selflessness and God's quality of love.

This requires of us a kindred spirit to that of the apostle Paul in his saying, *"Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1)*. He does not say, "Follow me," but simply urges a following of Christ by observing whatever is clearly Christ-like in his daily walk with the Lord.

If we see headship as a leadership role, we need to have deeply stamped on our hearts the words of Jesus: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and then: high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28)*.

Understanding is also an aspect of headship. We cannot be adequate heads unless we have commensurate understanding for the role. What kind of understanding?

I believe we need a new renewing of the mind so that we see from God's perspective, not the viewpoint of men.

We are repeatedly called to love God "with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength." "We have...received the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." The nature of understanding required in headship is an understanding of God and His ways. This is a God-given quality.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom" (James 3:13).

Headship of What and of Whom?

Wherever a believer has responsibility, there is a need for properly understood headship. This applies to the office, the home, the class and the hospital ward. Men may be only too well aware that it applies in the marriage, but they should see that it first applies to their own hearts.

"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city," says the proverb (Prov. 16:32). Doesn't this verse show that we should give priority to ruling our own hearts, by the grace of God? It certainly indicates that it is more important from God's perspective for us to control our own inner being than to be head over a person or a city.

Learning from a Husband's Headship Role

A husband is head under the Head. In every realm, our headship is relative and subject to the absolute Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person may be head of an organization or of a business venture, but if he is a follower of the Lord Jesus, he does not have the right to do as he pleases. The Lord is the Head, and to remain spiritually healthy he will need to submit to Jesus in everything.

If that businessman, or a husband, exercises headship contrary to the instructions of his Head through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, he then loses connection with Christ the Head. No one dare doubt that this is a most serious matter, requiring immediate and total repentance.

As head, the husband has a Christ-like role. He is head of his wife in the same way that Christ is Head of the Church. Do you know what that implies? It means that when someone observes my attitudes toward my wife—the way that I speak to her, the things that I require of her—he should gain a clear, pure and fragrant understanding of Christ's love for His Church and of His care of her.

What a challenge! For a man to love his wife as Christ loves His Church is a life-long task, challenge and privilege. In every properly exercised realm of headship there will be an example of the way the Lord Jesus loves us all.

The way in which a wife submits to her husband, her head, in everything should likewise be a clear and inspiring example of what the Church should be toward the Lord Jesus, her glorious Head.

Why should a husband expect submission from his wife? Why does the Lord Jesus require the submission of His followers? Not for one moment would we believe that Jesus requires our submission so that His position will be recognized and honored. He requires submission so that He may bless those who yield to Him!

Self-giving marks the character of the Lord Jesus perfectly. We would never adequately understand the love of Christ unless we understood Calvary! When Paul wrote about it he told the Philippian believers, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ" (2:5). This is a tremendous challenge and call to proper headship on the part of husbands, and for us all, since we each have some area in which we are called to be the head.

A wife should gladly and completely submit to her husband as he is submitted to his Head. This is so that each head may impart blessing to those who submit to him. Jesus requires the Church's submission so that He may keep her pure, free, fulfilled and exclusively His.

No human role ought to detract from or undermine Christ's Headship in any way. The Church is exclusively His! When leaders speak possessively of "my church" or "our group," they are blasphemously robbing God of what is exclusively His! An American brother ministering in South Africa teaches a series under the title of "Disciples of the King." Don't you like that? The Church is the Lord's, and we are called to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Himself, not of men.

Another reason that Jesus calls for the Church's submission is so that He may do for her what she cannot do for herself. We are very dependent on His grace and should abandon the humanistic thinking that the Church can be built by our dedication, zeal, earnestness, activity, evangelism, holiness, wisdom and strength. Only through complete and radical submission to the Lord Jesus in everything will the Church become radiant, holy, blameless and without blemish.

Obligations of Spiritual Headship

In whatever sphere we are called to exercise headship there is an obligation to discover what is right, including the way forward into the fullness of God's present purposes. God-given discernment is essential, because the sharpest human intellect is totally useless when it comes to understanding the mind and heart of the Lord.

Unless we walk in progressive revelation from the Lord, we will lock ourselves into the church bondage of Egypt's slavery or the arid wilderness experience of substandard Christian living. The further tragedy is that those who have become accustomed to look to us for leadership direction will probably also stay trapped in a similar condition. I challenge you on the Lord's behalf: Free them to hear God for themselves. Set such an example of hearing the voice of the Lord and responding to it that others will be able to follow you as you follow Christ.

If we have some kind of Christian headship function, we will need to discover how to free the Lord's people to hear and follow Him, while at the same time accepting prime, but not sole, responsibility for spiritual progress and development. This may seem to be a contradiction of terms, but it involves a releasing of people from our lordship to Jesus' Lordship. It also requires the godly example of our breaking free from man-made church trappings as we adventure into the unknown of God's highest desires for us all in this day.

Finally, we need to come quickly to where we stand where Jesus stands on issues, in attitudes and also in confidence in His Father. This involves standing in the same manner, with the same attitude and desire that He would have if He were in our shoes now.

During His years on earth Jesus had absolute, unwavering and truly amazing confidence in His Father.

Today faith is often depicted as a key for obtaining from God. You want to "get" saved? Have faith. You want to "get" healed? Have faith. You want to "get" the baptism? Have faith. And so on, and so on.

Faith is much more than that! Follow Jesus' example of confidence in His Father as a perpetual attitude in life. God is totally trustworthy. Never doubt it! There may seem to be high risks in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit into ways that others will probably

misunderstand, but it is not so! There is no risk whatsoever in trustfully obeying the Lord. Demonstrate your dependence and reliance on Him by following with a joyful step wherever He leads you. There's glory ahead!

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

