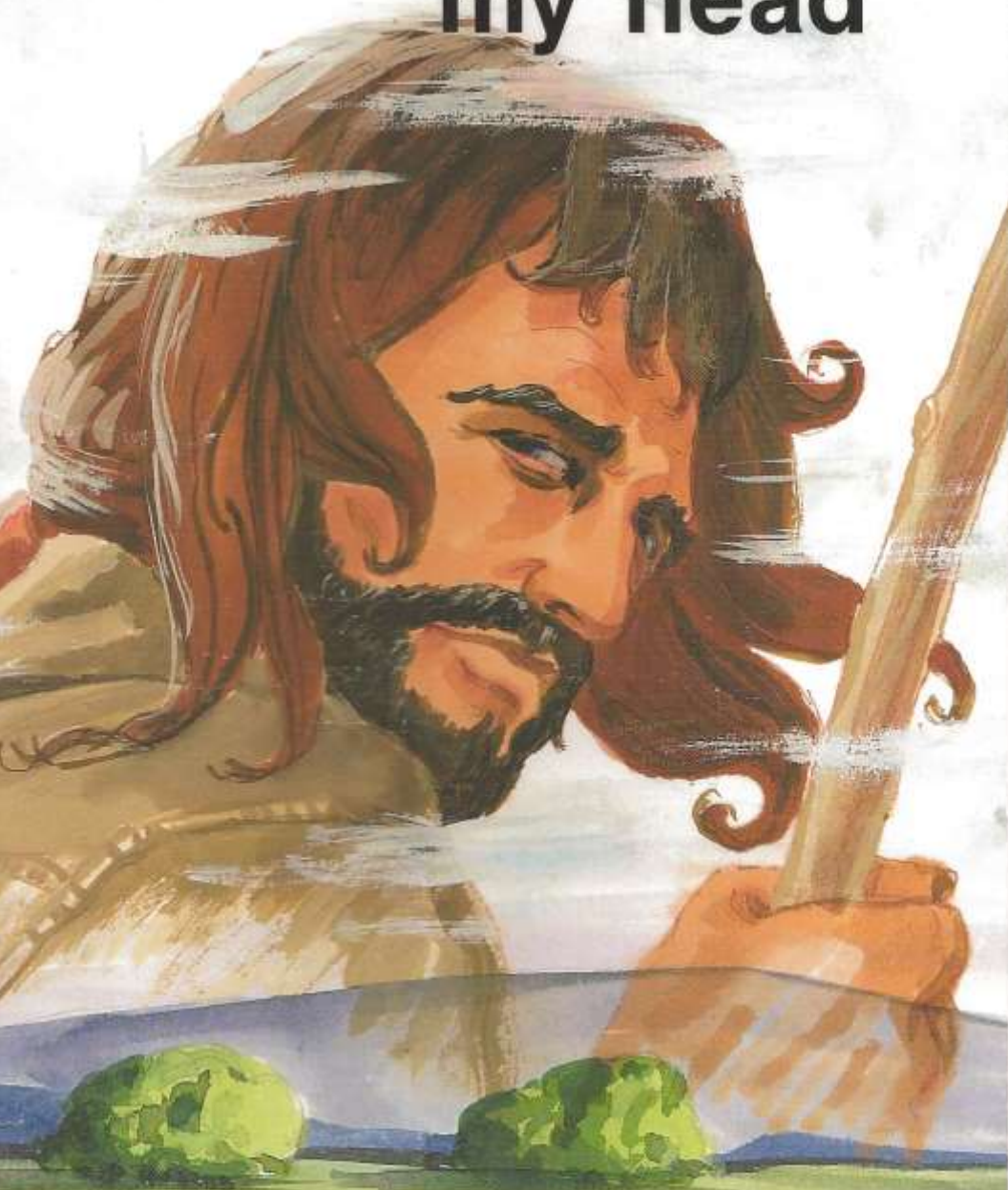


No place to lay my head



by Ralph Nault

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By Ralph Nault

Edited by Judith Doctor
Updated by Michael Nault

Cover by Ian Shields

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PREFACE

All my life I have been a dreamer. I have been a day-dreamer and a night dreamer, but I never dreamed that my dreams could come true. I also was a reader. As I read I would project myself into the story I was reading. I would become the hero, the leader; the one who did wonderful things. Sometimes I was the super being who could do supernatural things.

But when it would all come to an end, I would have to face the world as it really was. I was not the hero, the leader, the super being; I was just a timid boy and very self-conscious with a big inferiority complex.

As I grew older, nothing really changed. I was still the dreamer with a big front. Timid, self-conscious, and feeling inferior. I could not face the world and live life fully.

I was unable to accept the challenge that life offers.

I reached a point where I considered taking my life because my marriage was falling apart. As I cried out in desperation to God, He came to me in a wonderful way.

This book is an expression of the change that Jesus worked in my life. I no longer have to escape life by dreaming because my dreams have become reality. No longer do I have to hide behind a big front. No longer am I timid or self-conscious. I do not have that terrible inferiority complex anymore.

Although I always have had a little church experience in my life, I must confess it was all an outward external practice of Christianity. It was not the life changing experience it should have been. That has now changed. In fact my entire life has changed because I had a "spiritual experience" with God. The Holy Spirit has led me in new paths. I do not live, act, or talk as I did before. My church life is also different; it is a deep, inner heart experience instead of a shallow, external practice.

In a book I was reading recently it was saying how difficult it is for people to change their culture, traditions, and way of life. As I read this book, I realized that is the way it is when we decide to be disciples of Jesus Christ, followers of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly we are confronted with a culture change. We were living a natural life; now we are faced with a spiritual faith life.

In this new walk our values are different, our way of thinking is different, and we do things differently. We are going through the transition from natural, carnal people to spiritual people.

From my travels I know many are going through this type of experience today. I know this book can help you understand what you are experiencing, and make your transition from the natural to the spiritual much easier.

CHAPTER 1

THE SEEKERS

My wife, Pauline, and I have traveled many miles and met many people during the last several years. We have noticed that there is a restlessness within many people. You can sense it in their homes, their churches, their work, and even in their play. I also find this restlessness within myself and with my own family.

We find many people who are dissatisfied with their jobs and accomplishments, their marriage, and their churches. They get new jobs, but after the newness wears off they are still unhappy. They do great things, and they are still unsatisfied. They remarry and find that it isn't much different than before; marriage is still a challenge. They join a different church. At first it seems great, but then the newness wears off and they find they are not really happy with things after all. Life is still unsatisfying.

I had lunch with a friend one day, and he was sharing with me some of his life, his victories and defeats. He had become an ordained priest and had his own parish, as well as a good position in a college. He later went on to become a doctor with his own practice. He is married to a fine woman. To top it all off he knows Jesus Christ as his Savior. Some might say, "If only I could do half those things, my life would be full." But I noticed something about this man. He was restless; he was seeking some things he hadn't found.

He told me he was looking for his 'niche', the place where he would 'fit in'.

My own past is different from this man's. I never finished high school. When I was young I went to church because I had to. I knew very little about religion. I labored on farms and the railroad, as a lumberjack and a truck driver. I also served as a marine and did many other types of work. I finally got married at twenty-five years old and started my own business as an electrical contractor. I, too, came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. Over a period of years the Lord called us into a full-time evangelism and teaching ministry.

The background and work of this man, I mentioned, is different from mine, but yet I could relate to him as he shared with me. I could feel the heartache, pain, and frustration and at times the joy and victory. He expressed the defeats and weeping. His questions were, "What is it all about? Where is my place? Isn't there a place in this world where I fit in?"

I could identify with him. I had asked the same questions. As different as our lives were, we were walking the same path, as seekers.

When this man told me he was looking for his 'niche', I said, "I don't think you are going to find it, not here."

He gave me a questioning look, "Why do you say that?"

I answered, "Didn't you tell me you wanted to go on with God?"

He replied, "Yes!"

"Then you are a stranger and a pilgrim", I told him, "That is why you are not going to find your niche."

"Therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, which is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:12-16)

Many people are seeking for their 'niche'. I, however, would encourage you to stop looking and accept the fact that you are a temporary pilgrim on this earth. Enjoy the trip, without getting too fixed to it.

I have read stories about time travel. Well, that is what I am on. I am a pilgrim traveling through time and space, right to the end of eternity. Isn't that exciting!

CHAPTER 2

NOWHERE TO LAY MY HEAD

"And a certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'

And another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.'" (Mt. 8:19-23)

These Scriptures are saying something to us, both as individuals and as the body of Christ. I believe somehow our concept of church is wrong. We meet Jesus in a rebirth experience, get filled with the Holy Spirit, join some good church and become a member of it for the rest of our lives and that's it. I refuse to accept this. It is too much like the fox going to his hole and the birds returning to their nests. It is too much like I indeed have found a place to lay my head.

Jesus Christ called His disciples out of their nests and out of their holes. He called them to be like Him, "no place to lay my head".

I want to see the church become like Christ, active and going places.

In all too many places, now, the church has become the place of rest, the place of protection, and the place of the free meal handed

out to the poor starving man who cannot feed himself. It has become the place where everything is taken care of for us, our social life and our spiritual life. It is all handed to us on a silver platter. This is exactly what many Christians want, and why it is so widely accepted. Sadly, there are many who want to be Christians with a place to lay their head. This includes pastors and teachers and evangelists, as well as laypeople.

The very church system which was intended for our good can become the snare which keeps us from growing. It can become the soothing ointment upon our conscience telling us we have done our part; that we are good members of our church. This would not be a lie! We can be good active members of our church and yet it can still be the place we lay our heads, our nest where we are comfortable. I am not saying that some church life should not be a part of our Christian walk. It should be. But I am saying there should be, and can be, a lot more to our Christianity than what most of us are experiencing.

The words that Jesus spoke, "Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites. For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." (Mt.23:23)

The Bible is loaded with sermons, stories and teachings which are very nice to listen to and are scripture, but they keep people content. They don't necessarily stir people up to become like Christ, who was active in doing the works of God.

From what I have seen and experienced, we as the church are neglecting to do the works of Jesus.

Jesus Christ came with power and authority. Everywhere He went there was a demonstration of the power of God; miracles, healings, deliverance from evil spirits. He didn't wait until He arrived in the

temple with all the people gathered to do these things, but they followed in His wake: in the city, in the country, along the highways and byways of life. We have this mentality, "Come to the next prayer meeting when so and so will be there," or "Come to church and hear our pastor". What has happened to us doing these things as part of our everyday life? Perhaps the nesting instinct has taken hold of us.

The Bible says there are certain things that we should not neglect. What are some of these things?

I believe we are negligent in ministering spontaneously by the Spirit to one another. We should not have to wait until the next meeting. You can listen to the Holy Spirit and minister with your own faith. We are negligent in the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, both as individuals and as a body. We do not lay hands on one another often enough. We see in the Bible that laying on of hands was done for healing, for the filling of the Holy Spirit, for a blessing, or in preparation for the work of ministry.

We too often allow fears and worries to harass us. We allow strife and quarreling to fill our homes. We need to remember to use the power God has given us in every realm of life.

I believe we are negligent with our talents. Many do not know what their talents are or how to use them. In many places we are neglecting spiritual growth. We put on an external religious suit, yet inside we have no spiritual life. In such cases, we are just like the scribes and Pharisees. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." (Mt. 23:25)

We are negligent in our giving. In most of our churches there are some who are hurting for money and goods, and yet there are others who have much more than they need of both. The neglect is not only in money and goods; it is also in the giving of ourselves.

Many of us neglect to support missionary type work in the world. Closer to home, our own pastors, teachers and evangelist need our help in the community. We are negligent in speaking out in a clear, loud voice on controversial issues which are very important to us and to our children. We say the church made a statement, but that is not enough. We as individuals must make the statement too. All too often we use the church for our scapegoat, to avoid our own personal responsibility for things we should have done.

Last year the Lord spoke to me and told me to pray for boldness. Well, that was a good idea. I could certainly use some more boldness to share my faith to the world. I started to pray, "Lord give me the boldness to shout from the roof-tops the good news." Again the Holy Spirit spoke to me, "You are not praying right, pray that you will have the boldness to speak to the church the way it needs to be spoken to."

Well, I was not quite so anxious to pray for that. It is one thing to speak to the world the good news. They will just tell you to shut your mouth or tune you out and not listen, but to speak to the church what it needs to hear is something else, for it can become violent. If you don't believe this look back at church history. Religious people can be a very violent people. You can get stoned or crucified. Down through the years many people who have spoken the truth to the church have suffered violence and even death. Of course, today we are more civilized; you are just put out and maybe your reputation is destroyed instead.

And the Holy Spirit said, "Pray for the boldness to speak to the church the way it needs to be spoken to." I prayed, and in a few weeks it became very apparent to me that I was beginning to speak with greater boldness to the church. I also pray for pastors and teachers to have the courage and boldness to speak to the church the way that Jesus or St. Paul would, with a new directness; saying

the things that need to be spoken and not the things people want to hear.

Our prayer today as members of the church needs to be "God give me the boldness and courage to be as Jesus was and as St. Paul, Peter, and John. Bold men and women, moving in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, doing 'the work of Jesus'."

Brothers and sisters, the nest will not satisfy you. Let us remember our calling to be pilgrims and strangers here on earth; following in the footsteps of Jesus, with no place to lay our heads.

CHAPTER 3

COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

Why is it that God has always been calling His people out? He spoke to Abraham and said "Come out from among your brethren." Later, He called His people to be different from the people of the world. In the new covenant, He tells us to come out from among them and be not like them. In the book of Hebrews 12:13-14, it says, "Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."

Over and over the Bible points out the same thing. The people who want to 'know' him must 'come out'. They must be 'seeking people'. They must be a 'hungering, thirsty people'. They must be a people willing to leave the 'past' behind; a people willing to 'walk new paths'. They must be a people of faith seeking a city that does not have its foundations on this earth, seeking something that this world cannot give.

It is very easy to feel confused about this statement, "Come out from among them." We like to can or box everything so neatly and say this means this, and that means that. We could say, "Come out from among those sinners." Is this what God wants? I don't think so. I have heard it interpreted, "Come out from among the Catholics." Is this what God wants? I don't think so. I think it is saying, "Be different in the midst of them." I believe God wants us to come out of any outward form of religion which has no spiritual

life in it. There are things in all of our lives that we need to 'come out of'. Maybe we need to come out of a way of speaking. Perhaps we need to come out of a way of praying or ministering that is not pleasing to God. Every one of us needs to listen to the Spirit of God and 'come out' from that which He is telling us to come out of. We need to obey His voice.

Many people have been hindered in their spiritual walk. Well-intentioned people and spiritual advisors have said come out of this or that, when it was not the Lord's will at all. I am not saying the Lord will not use people to speak through; I know He does. But when He does He confirms it in our own hearts by His Spirit. Listen carefully when the Spirit is telling you to 'come out of' something and then act quickly. Don't be intimidated by men who have titles of teacher, evangelist, pastor, bishop, elder or deacon. Remember they are servants. I am not knocking them; treat them with respect. But do not be afraid of them or controlled and manipulated by them.

A book I read recently, spoke of the need to bring some people out of religion because it was not good for them and of the need for others to be brought into a religion for their best growth. As I read this, the Spirit made me aware that this man was absolutely right. Some men need to become religious to find God, and others need to be freed from religion in order to find God. May God give us the wisdom to know what a man needs to find God in his life. May God give us the wisdom to know what we are to come out of and go into.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Spirit tells some men to change churches. I know some people who have come out of Baptist churches and became Catholics because the Spirit directed them to do this. I know Catholics who have become Baptists because the Spirit directed them to do that. I also know people who have come totally out of the organized church because the Spirit directed them to do that. But can we allow men this kind of

freedom and still have the institutional church? I think so. We can trust the Holy Spirit. He knows what each person needs. He knows each person's bondages and what is best for him at a particular time of his life.

We need to remember our goal and seek for the city that does not have its foundations here on earth.

CHAPTER 4

THE ACCUSED!

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Rom. 8:14)

I would like to paraphrase the above Scripture so you can better understand the things I am going to share.

"For all who have learned to know the leading and voice of the Holy Spirit, and have become obedient to it, these are sons of God who have come of age and are mature."

Have any of you ever been accused of being rebellious, of doing your own thing, or of not being submissive, when this was not true? I am sure you have at one time or another; as a kid, at college, as husband or wife, on the job, and even in the church.

When I began to seek God and to try and obey Him many accusations came against me. Many of the people I knew who were trying to be obedient to the Holy Spirit experienced the same thing.

The more I tried to grow up and become an effective person in the body of Christ, the more continual and stronger the accusations became. More of the criticism came from the leaders of the church. It seemed as if they did not want the lay people in the church to go beyond a certain point of growth. The leadership of the church was afraid to lose control.

Now I am not trying to make any accusations against anyone in authority. I am only trying to express what I went through, and I believe many others go through. It is like the struggle to break the umbilical cord or like a young man trying to break free from parental control. In fact, I would go on to say that God has arranged it to be this way.

The baby has to be freed from its mother's womb by the cutting of the umbilical cord. The young man, who is beginning to make his way in the world must be released from his parent's control. We, too, must break free from our childish relationship to the church of always being told what to do, what not to do, and what to think about everything. We must break free from the position of being watched over and protected, of being watered and fed by someone else.

If someone were to ask me to describe a pastor or a shepherd, I would have to describe him as a jealous, aggressive, defensive, and very protective mother hen with a brood of chicks. I am not saying this in any way to put down pastors because this is what they must be to do the job God has called them to do.

But is there a time and place when we have to break free from this kind of a relationship with a pastor? Yes, there is! Now remember the kind of person God has made him to be. He has jealously guarded you. He has been very aggressive for your benefit. He has defended you and protected you. He has the mother hen instinct. This is what you are going to have to break loose from. The very qualities which have been to your benefit in the past can now become the very bondage from which you must break free.

Have you ever noticed how many accusations come from a young man who is breaking free? The parents make many accusations, but the young man also makes many accusations. Are the accusations correct? Yes, some of them are.

What are some of the things the young man might say? "They try to tell me everything to do. They still treat me like a child. They are trying to control my life. They don't give me any freedom. They are trying to make me be what they want me to be. They don't trust me. They don't think I am old enough. They don't think I can pick good friends."

I am sure these are but a few of the accusations which might be made by any teen-ager over sixteen. Is there any truth in these accusations? There is some truth in every one of them.

Now what would the parents have to say about the young man? "He is being rebellious. I am only doing these things for his own good. He's not old enough yet. He needs someone to tell him what to do. He is making all kinds of mistakes. He should not be doing that. He's not making the right decisions. He needs someone to watch over him. He is going to get into trouble. He needs to pick different friends. I am responsible for him." Every parent could add to the list. Is there any truth in these statements? Yes! There's truth in all of them.

I have made my share of accusations about my children. They in turn have made their share of accusations against me. There was truth in all of them. I praise God for we have now gone beyond that part of our lives. We talk to our children as peers. We let them work out their lives, make their own decisions, and their mistakes. They in turn have come to a place where they listen to what we have to offer and ask for advice regarding difficult decisions. We have all stopped making accusations.

There have been times in my life when I thought my father and others who were in charge of bringing me up were against me. I know now it was not true. They loved me and were concerned about me.

There was a time in my life when I thought the police were my enemies and I feared them. Now I know this is not true. We need the police, the National Guard, the army. They uphold the laws of the land so we might live in peace.

I now realize that all these experiences were a part of growing up, part of my pilgrimage.

I would like to relate all this to my spiritual Christian walk. About twenty-three years ago I experienced the power of God in my life. I was seriously thinking of suicide. I cried out to the Lord and He heard me. Jesus saved my marriage and my life. Seven years later I received another blessing when I met the Holy Spirit in a wonderful way. The Holy Spirit directed me to start a prayer meeting and Bible study in my home. I did it with the blessing of our local priest. God blessed that meeting and many people came to know the Lord Jesus in a new and deeper way.

At this point we began to be accused of many things. As the ministry increased through the years, so did the accusations. Some of it came from within our own church, some from other churches in our area. Some of the accusations came from priests and ministers who had never come to a single meeting. I also made my share of accusations against them.

Do you know that most of the accusations were very similar to the ones which were made when my children were growing up and breaking loose? I was making the same accusations against the church and pastors that my kids made against me. The church and pastors were accusing me of the same things of which I accused my kids. It was a trying time.

I thank God this part of my pilgrimage is over. I now function with my pastor as a peer and not as a child. I have stopped my accusations, and I think most of the accusations from the other side have stopped also. Even as I have a new relationship with my

children, I also have a new relationship with the church and the pastors. I look to them for advice and help in our ministry, and I try to help and encourage them in return. In the past, my relationship with the church was child and parent; today it is co-workers in God's vineyard.

From time to time I talk with troubled young people, and I usually make this remark in our conversation, "It is difficult and painful growing up." I now realize it is difficult and painful growing up in the spiritual realm, also.

There will be times we are called rebels, accused and misunderstood, and other times we will be doing the accusing as we struggle to mature.

In the process of growing up, we have to reach out in new ways and be released from old things. They are good for us in the beginning, but there comes a time when that good thing is no longer good for us.

"When I was a child, I use to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things."
(1 Cor. 13:11)

CHAPTER 5

THE PROMISE

"Come out from among your people, and into the land that I call you." This is what God said to Abraham. From that day forth, God has been calling His people to Himself. God made promises to Abraham and He fulfilled them. Down through the ages, He has made promises to His people and He has kept them.

We find in Acts 1:4, Jesus tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the "promise of the Father". Again in Acts 2:16, Peter explains to the people what is happening to them, "But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind'."

Jesus tells us in another place, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Holy Spirit will not come. But if I go away the Holy Spirit will come, and He will be with you and in you."

Why did Jesus think that it was more important for the Holy Spirit to be with us than for Him to be with us? I think this is explained quite well in the Scripture Peter used, "I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind."

Who is the Holy Spirit? It is the Spirit of God. He was going to come down and unite with all of mankind. Jesus said, "The Holy Spirit will be with you and in you." He also said, "Out of your inner most being

will flow rivers of living water." He was speaking of the Holy Spirit who was to come. He could have said, "Out of the depths of your being you will become very fruitful."

As a rule when we speak of the Holy Spirit, we speak of the power, the authority, the gifts, the fruit, and of being led by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit. But I think there is a very important part of the work of the Holy Spirit which is too often totally by-passed. I am speaking of revelation from the Holy Spirit.

We, as the church of Jesus Christ, are to be a revelation people. You might ask, "Revelation of what?" Revelation of God! We are to have a revelation of God; we are to 'know God'.

In Acts 2:17 it says, "And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." These things are all referring to revelation. The men of old, the prophets, received revelation in these ways. It is also saying to us we are going to receive revelation just like the men of old did.

In 1 Cor. 2:6-12, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him,' For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world,

but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God."

What is it that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man? The revelation of God Himself, of what He is and who He is. I believe the greatest work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Father to man. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us to reveal to us the mind and heart depths of God.

If we get so wrapped up in the gifts and ministry of the Holy Spirit and miss this important aspect of the Holy Spirit's work, we miss the most important part of all.

I think the promise of the Father was nothing less than this, "I will be with you and in you and I will be your God and you will be My people, and I will reveal Myself to you, and you will know Me from the greatest to the least, and you will have no need for any man to teach you, for I will teach you all things. I will lead you by My Spirit, and I will bring you into the land of Promise. You will be more than victors and more than conquerors, and you will know that

I am God! And that I keep My promises." This promise of the Holy Spirit is a great blessing for those on a spiritual journey.

CHAPTER 6

ON THE ROAD

Several years ago I read the book, "Pilgrim's Progress". At that time I could really relate to the story of Pilgrim on the road, searching for the heavenly city. Later I read the story of the author's life and I could see that "Pilgrim's Progress" was really the story of his own life. He had somehow poured his experiences into his writing. There are some books which increase the intellect, some which play on our emotions, and others which stir up our imagination. There are also those which somehow touch the spirit of a man and give him life and hope and encouragement. "Pilgrim's Progress" is one of those which gave me life. I think it was because the author put his own experiences into it.

As I write I am trying to somehow put my own experiences into this book to help you understand the things I sense and feel in my spirit about this road that leads to life. I, too, am a pilgrim on the road.

If you have ever traveled very much, you are aware that you meet many different kinds of people. In our traveling my wife and I have met some wonderful people, but we have also met some very difficult and strange ones. Some have wanted to do everything for us; others wanted everything we had. Some wanted to be friends; some our enemies. Some dreamed like us; some didn't. Some talked our language and some had a language of their own. We did not understand them and they did not understand us. We met some people in our travels who were going the same way we were;

others were going in the opposite direction. Some traveled in cars and some on motorcycles. Some rode in trucks, some hitchhiked and others traveled by plane.

As we have traveled we have met wise men and foolish, silent and talkative, timid and bold, honest and dishonest. We have met men whom we could relate to and men we could not relate to at all. There were some with whom we became friends, and there were others where the gulf between us was so great that it could never be bridged.

Now I know as I take to the road on my spiritual pilgrimage I am going to encounter the same kinds of people and the same kinds of problems that I have encountered in my natural travels. But one thing is very important for me to remember, they are all travelers, too. It seems in this day and age there are many strangers and pilgrims on a spiritual quest. They seem to be from every type of background you can imagine. They are from every nation, every denomination, every tribe, every language, every culture and every tradition. And I am sure there are many things that differ about them. They have one thing in common, however; they are pilgrims and strangers seeking a city that does not have its foundations here on earth.

I remember a Scripture from the book of Revelation, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'." (Rev. 7:9-10)

In Isaiah 35:3-4 we read, "Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with palpitating hearts, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you'." This Scripture tells us what

we must do for one another; we are to encourage and strengthen each other. It is not a pilgrimage all by yourself. There are others traveling with you. Some are slower, some are faster. The speed we travel is not so important. What is important is that we help one another!

On this pilgrimage we are often discouraged, disappointed, dismayed; despairing and defeated. That's why we need to help one another. Don't give up on each other or yourself.

May God help us to recognize other strangers and pilgrims on the road who are seeking the same city; that we might somehow help and encourage one another along the way.

CHAPTER 7

I AM NOT ALONE

"Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." (Heb.13:13-14)

To me this Scripture is saying: "Hence, let us dare to do something different from what others around us are doing. Let us dare to break some of the rules and traditions which have kept us aloof from the Holy Spirit. Let us dare to walk a new path which no one around us is walking. Let us dare to be obedient to the Holy Spirit, even if we are laughed at and rejected. For everything around us is going to pass away, all our rules and traditions and the Church system as we know it today."

We have a lot of lonely people around. Outwardly, they put on a good show. They talk, they laugh, but inwardly they are very lonely and untouchable.

I have been in bars and night clubs and watched the people. It is not hard to see that much of what goes on there is very shallow. Maybe this is to be expected. I have also sat in many churches and have seen very shallow relationships there, with just as many lonely and untouchable people. I have sat in fellowship groups and have seen very shallow relationships between most of the people. We have even been in religious communities, where men and women have dedicated their lives to serving God and the church. There,

too, we have seen many people with shallow relationships who are very lonely.

I believe many of the people reading this have the problem of loneliness. We can be very involved in our home, church, work, or play and yet be very lonely, isolated people. We can have people around us constantly and still be lonely people.

The very purpose of this book is to speak to pilgrims; people on a quest, seeking to find the reality of life and of God.

I am sure that most of you can relate to the things of which I speak. Something happened when Adam fell from grace. For the first time man began to experience loneliness and man has experienced it ever since. We find even Jesus experienced it when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

From my own experience, I would say loneliness can make you ill. Maybe at some point in our lives we all have a little homesickness, and we actually become sick. I believe some of the actual sickness we feel in our body, mind, and spirit comes as a direct result of this loneliness within us.

We have two levels in our being: the soulish or natural and the spiritual level. Loneliness comes mostly from the spiritual level. If we can accept this, then we can understand why just going to a nightclub, or joining another church, or getting involved in sports, or being very active in our work, or even belonging to a religious community still leave us lonely people.

I spend more time alone, now, than I ever have in my life. Yet, I am not lonely anymore.

Let's consider the scripture, Ephesians 4:3, "Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Also another scripture, Psalm 132:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

The word 'unity' is interesting. It means 'oneness' or 'completeness'. I don't think we can have oneness or completeness apart from the Spirit. We try to have unity of doctrine or ways of doing things. We try for unity of thought, but we all think a little differently on just about every issue. The churches try to get together on doctrine, but it is not the unity of doctrine or rules or traditions that is important. What is important is that we recognize and have a unity in the Spirit. This will allow us to have differing doctrines and traditions and still love and accept one another as brothers and sisters.

Several times we have heard this kind of a story from Christian people: "We moved into this new place and there are no Christians in the area at all. We are very alone here."

A year or two goes by and the same people are saying, "There are all kinds of Christians around. When we first came, we didn't think there were any. Now we find they were here all the time, only we didn't know about them."

Some people think that they must have physical contact to have unity. I don't mean sexual contact; I mean coming together often as a group. There are times when we want to maintain unity we must separate and go our own individual ways in life. For an example of this we go to the Scriptures.

In Genesis 13:6-9, we read, "And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your

herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me: if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left."

So Abram and Lot separated, as brothers in unity. Lot took first choice and Abram took what was left. And God was pleased with Abram. It goes on to say in Genesis 13:14-15, "And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give to you and to your descendants forever.'"

There are times we keep the unity by separating and going our individual ways, and if we try to hang together, we have strife and disunity.

My wife and I are apart from our family most of the time now. But we have unity with them. We are now apart from our church most of the time also, but we are not lonely; we have a unity with the church. I don't agree with all the laws of the organized church. I don't agree with all the doctrine of the organized church. But in spite of that, I have unity with the spiritual body of Christ and God. I am not alone any longer.

CHAPTER 8

INTO THE DITCH

A beautiful thing is happening in the church today. Many, many faithful church-goers are coming into a new and deeper relationship with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Through this deeper relationship, these people are seeing the Scriptures and the church in a whole new way. They are having to learn all over again many of the basic teachings of the Scriptures. And this is not limited to the lay people of the church only; pastors, teachers, priests, nuns, elders and even bishops are entering into this renewal. I have heard ministers and priests say, "I am just beginning to understand the Bible now. I have just come to know Jesus and the Holy Spirit after years in the ministry."

What is the outcome, then, when this type of renewal is going on in the church and right within the leadership of the church also? We find many babies, as far as spiritual things are concerned, in leadership positions; and we find many babies among the lay people who have been church members and perhaps church leaders for years. The outcome is this...confusion! This confusion leaves an open door for the enemy to come in and really mess up the church. The enemy is not people; it is Satan and the demonic powers of darkness.

On the one hand we have lay people who are just babes in Christ. They are full of zeal and think they have all the answers; they try to run the church and tell the pastor everything he is doing is wrong.

They spread dissension and create serious problems and rifts in the church. They also give the enemy, Satan, an open door to come in and devour some of the sheep.

But on the other hand we have lay people who have come to know Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They know how to function in and discern spiritual things. But their elders and pastors do not understand spiritual things at all. They have no discernment and are not equipped to do spiritual battle. Who needs to teach whom? Who needs to listen to whom? Who needs to lead whom? It is an embarrassing situation, is it not? Satan takes full advantage of it.

The Scriptures give us a warning, "The blind lead the blind and they all fall into the ditch." In the past twenty-three years I have fallen into the ditch several times. Why do we fall into the ditch? Is it because we stray off the road? Sometimes I strayed off the road on my own, and other times it was because I was misled by others. Some of these people I trusted a lot, so I didn't pay much attention until I found myself in trouble. Sometimes I found myself in the ditch because I thought I was more spiritually mature than I really was. Then I proved to be a stumbling block for others who trusted me, and I led them into the ditch.

In one of Watchman Nee's books he wrote, "For the first ten years after we receive the Baptism of the Spirit we need to run around with a big sign on our back stating 'BEWARE, LEARNER'." I now agree with him.

The Holy Spirit is not a respecter of persons; He will come to whoever desires to know God and to be used by God.

What is the answer to all this? One of the most common mistakes we all make as spiritual men and women is that we over-estimate the spirituality of our teachers and pastors. As a result of this mistake on our part, we land up sooner or later being disappointed and then reject them. We think because a man has had a lot of

training he is spiritually mature; if he knows the Bible from end to end, he is spiritually mature; if he speaks well and seems to be a good organizer and moves with authority that he is spiritually mature. A man can have all these things going for him and not be spiritually mature! Yet another man can have none of these things and be spiritually mature with the wisdom that comes only from God. I am not saying we reject a man because he is not spiritually mature, but we better be watchful where he is leading us for we might fall into a spiritual pitfall, a ditch.

It is the responsibility of the leader to lead, but we have a responsibility to test everything, thoroughly. I remember my dad used to say, "Just because someone tells you to go jump in the lake, it doesn't mean you have to do it." What he meant by that was that every time someone tells you to do some foolish thing it doesn't mean you have to follow. Whenever someone who is leading you is ready to step off the bank, you grab him and pull him back. You don't join him.

The best thing to do if we can see is to help lead the blind. I have been guilty of pushing the blind into the ditch. I pray this will not happen again. If we cannot help the blind, at least we can stop pushing them around. If we have a leader who is blind, don't reject him; help him. Don't push him into the ditch, but help him to stay out of the ditch. Remember you were once blind, too.

I think part of the answer is in the following Scriptures: "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth." (Col. 3:1-2)

"But now you also, put them all aside; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and

have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." (Col. 3:8-17)

"A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (Col. 3:17)

I think that all of us need to read these Scriptures every day until they become manifested in our lives. Then maybe we will see more clearly. We will be able to lead the blind in new paths, without breaking any bones, or falling into the ditches that seem to be so plentiful.

CHAPTER 9

ROBBED AND BLIND

"Jesus replied and said, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him and went off leaving him half dead, and by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side, and likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you'." (Luke 10:30-35)

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, you could say that they were all pilgrims and strangers, including the injured man by the side of the road. The priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, and the man left stripped, robbed and half dead, and the robbers; all were on the road.

In our spiritual pilgrimage today, we too encounter all these kinds of travelers. The Good Samaritan sees the need and does

something about it, even though it costs him something. The priest is a man who is called to serve and to be a servant. He is an elder of the church and performs the rituals and sacrifices. Then there was the Levite. The priest also came from the Levite tribe, but the duty of the tribe itself was to serve and to help the priest. Then there was the man who was robbed. I suppose he was going on about his business. And last, there were the robbers who took everything he had and left him for dead.

I praise and thank God that in my pilgrimage I now and again encounter good Samaritans who minister to me in my time of need and pain. But all too often I encounter the priest or the Levite. Even though I have a need and am in pain, they don't seem to be aware of it. They seem unable to help me. I no longer expect to receive much from them, so I am not disappointed when they are unable to help me. I am also now aware that robbers are about, who want to rob me and take all that I have. They are on the highways and byways of my spiritual walk, and they will leave me for dead if I am not careful. I have learned to watch for them, and to guard myself by having on the armor and by carrying a sword.

The man who was robbed was not prepared nor was he watchful. He was a little blind as to what might befall him or he would have been more prepared to meet that kind of emergency.

A good lesson for us to remember is in Ephesians 6:10-18, "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and

having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

You see, this message in the Scriptures is for pilgrims and strangers traveling through strange lands on paths which they have never walked before. We cannot afford to be asleep or blind or unprepared. For our treacherous enemy has one thing in mind, to rob, kill, and destroy us! We must not be ignorant of the many ditches that are around us. Watch out for the stumbling stones and the sin that so easily entangles our feet. They slow us down.

Go back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. We need to become aware that we can be the priest, the Levite, the Good Samaritan, or the injured man. It is even possible for us to be the robber. We might want their ministry or the power and authority they have. We might even covet the following they have. Desiring their blessing or the manifestation of the gifts God has given them is robbery. Oh yes! It is easy to be the robber. We can rob people of their faith, or their peace, or their joy. We can be envious because their loved ones are responding to the Lord. We can be jealous because God is using them greatly and not us. So we can speak things that are not edifying to them or their work. Does this type of thing happen in the body of Christ? Oh yes! We all know it does, all too often. Any of us can be the robber and leave injured people along our pilgrimage.

And where does this type of thing start?

"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust

and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:1-4)

There are many things which are controversial, which stir people up, things which we try to stay away from. Of course, there are always people who like to argue just for the sake of it. There are also those who think they have all the truth and are determined that you have to believe like them or you are in error. They want you to listen to them, but they never hear a word that you say.

People like this cannot see the error of their ways. I think the Bible expresses it somewhat like this: "When you reach the point of realizing that you don't know much that is the beginning of wisdom. As long as you think you know it all and have all the answers, you are foolish."

Scripture is saying, "If they would have understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." There are people and leaders in the world and in the church who are still persecuting Jesus. They are still rejecting Jesus and the Holy Spirit sent from God. They say, "I believe in God; I have faith; I am dedicated; I have been baptized; I am a member of the church; I have been ordained." But these same people want nothing to do with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In fact, they are enemies of those who share Jesus openly, who talk about the Holy Spirit and give praise and thanksgiving outside of the church walls. What is happening? They are crucifying the Lord of glory. Why are they crucifying the Lord of glory? Because they don't yet understand. They are not yet spiritually mature and do not have the wisdom that Paul spoke of. They are blind. Watch out where they try to lead you. You will meet many of them on your spiritual journey.

There are many natural men in the church. Some of them are in leadership places. Beware and do not be deceived or misled. I would say that every group has its share of natural men.

We can be blind pilgrims being led by other blind pilgrims. We can be blind pilgrims leading other pilgrims. We can be blind pilgrims being used by the enemy to bring harm to other pilgrims. Or we can be blind pilgrims that go merrily along, not being aware of any other folks along the way or of their needs. It is best that we travel along well prepared: seeing everyone along the way, helping the injured and weak and blind, and being on guard against the robber, so that we might stand firm on the evil day.

CHAPTER 10

BOUNDARIES AND BORDERS

Some time ago I was watching a movie on TV, which showed how the Indians in The United States were slowly pushed out of their lands. Their boundaries were made smaller and smaller until they really had nothing left.

Forming boundaries has been a natural way of doing things for a long time. Men like boundaries. If there aren't some already there, they will make them. Even the animals and the birds set boundaries. Boundaries seem to have something to do with ownership. Boundaries seem to say, "This is mine." They make us feel secure.

We find it does not take long for this idea of boundaries to form in children. Ownership exerts itself at a very young age and is very strong. We begin setting our boundaries even then. At first our boundaries are quite small, but they quickly grow to encompass more and more. Woe to those who trespass within our boundaries without our consent.

We erect boundaries in every realm: physical, mental, social, political, spiritual, and many others. Boundaries are set either to keep us in or out; or to keep others out.

From my own experience, I believe that we reach a point where we set certain boundaries and limits. For example, I meet a person and it doesn't take me long to set the boundary of how close I allow

that person in my life. Or I reach the point of having a nice home with five acres of land and a garden and that is all the pro position in my company and I am not interested in going any farther. I have set my boundary; my limits.

Of course, the greater our holdings, the larger our boundaries; the more ownership we have, the more responsibility we have. We can very easily reach the point of being brought into bondage by our holdings, by the things that we own. And we land up being the servant of and being locked in by our own boundaries.

For example, some women are in bondage to their homes. The house is not a home to them. They serve it constantly, and it is their prison. Women are not the only ones who have this problem. Men have the same bondage to their jobs. Their work is the master and they are the slaves.

The church system also has its boundaries. If you go beyond these boundaries, watch out!

The Catholic priest who falls in love and wants to get married has reached the boundary. If he steps over the boundary he is out, and would have a very difficult time getting back in. So then, we find that boundaries are difficult to pass through and just as difficult to re-enter.

Many of the nomadic people of the world are having a difficult time because it is so hard for them to pass over the borders. They have traveled freely for thousands of years and now they are restricted by boundaries. I just read the other day of animals in the Midwest who are dying because of the boundary fences restricting them from moving freely to find protection and food. Years ago, in Vermont, we could hunt and fish just about anywhere. Now much of the forest land is posted. No trespassing. Some of the places I used to fish read, "No fishing". A little problem with boundaries.

The Bible speaks of us as strangers and pilgrims, meaning we are exiles; "the state of being expelled from one's own country and forbidden to return" or "an abandonment of one's country to a foreign country by choice or necessity." Apparently, one of the requirements of being a stranger and pilgrim is that we must be willing to leave behind many of the things that were quite important to us in the past. We must be willing to cross boundaries that we are not going to be able to re-enter again. We will have to give up ownership of things that were very important to us.

I have a feeling that Jesus did not have many boundaries, maybe none. If we are to follow him, we may have to cross every boundary we have ever set up.

Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. It is our boundaries which separate us as individuals and as the body of Christ, the Church. It is in giving up everything that we gain everything. Because I let go of many boundaries that I had erected in my life, I now have a deeper and richer relationship with many people; both within and without the church.

To Pilate, Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm."(John 18:36)

Jesus did not worry about boundaries. He listened to the Father and obeyed Him. The Apostle Paul did not worry about boundaries either. After he was knocked to the ground on his way to Damascus, he was free of the boundaries that he had spent his whole life building up.

I believe that the following Scripture is talking about boundaries and their removal, and what it accomplishes.

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without Law, as without Law, though not being with the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I become weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some." (1 Cor. 9:19-22)

We do have many boundaries today, both in our churches and in our personal lives. It is these boundaries we are unwilling to cross; boundaries that keep us from being free men in Christ. They prevent us from being fruitful and from being led by the Holy Spirit. Some of the boundaries we have made. Some have been laid on us by others. They say in unspoken words, "Don't you dare cross this line."

One man who had to cross some boundaries to serve God was a man named Peter. He had to cross some religious boundaries for his life to become fruitful. As soon as he did, he began to reach people with the gospel.

There also seems to be a price we have to pay to cross boundaries, as many men and women have found out through the ages.

Again, I'll use the Scripture, "Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (Heb. 13:13)

The Scripture is talking about some boundaries being crossed. Are you a stranger and a pilgrim? Then don't be surprised when you come to some boundaries.

It takes faith to cross boundaries. The Israelites had a problem when they left Egypt. They thought for sure they were all going to

be killed at the border, the Red Sea. As they made it across, the water closed behind them and they could not go back.

Are there boundaries in our lives that God is going to ask us to cross and leave behind? I believe so, and even as the Israelites had a hard time crossing boundaries, so do most of us. Many of us will not cross the boundaries and as a result, will not enter into the fullness of what our lives could be.

May God help us when we come to the boundaries. May He give us faith to step over and keep going, in spite of the giants and reproaches that might come against us.

CHAPTER 11

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ROAD

The man without faith has a difficult time with the Bible, because there are so many things in it that are not reasonable. He will try to explain or twist them until his reason will accept them. The Bible is for spiritual men. He who functions from his spiritual level will not have the same problems understanding the Bible as the man who functions from his natural level.

The New Testament tells us that the Old Testament is a shadow of the new. The history of God's dealings with the Israelites is for our benefit. During their stay in Egypt the nation of Israel multiplied even though they were in captivity. The Egyptians would not let them go. Their miraculous delivery by Moses and their journey through the wilderness and into the Promised Land is a symbolic picture of our salvation and delivery through Jesus Christ.

If we follow them carefully, we will see the church goes through the same patterns and walks the same footsteps. The New Testament tells us these experiences are for our benefit, that we might see where they made mistakes and learn from them.

Notice that the Scriptures are full of symbolism. God uses it throughout history. Why is this? The heart seems to understand the language of symbolism much better than the mind does. It is the only universal language the human race has every developed. It is the same for all cultures and throughout history. It crosses

every boundary. It speaks not only to the English, the French and the German but to the Chinese and Arab as well. It speaks to the unlearned and to the intellectual. I don't believe there is a better method than symbolism if you want to say something to the world. And we know the message of the Bible is for the whole world.

Think of all the symbolic pictures in the Scriptures; the bread of heaven, light of the world, the rock, oil, and wine. Peter's instruction to take the gospel to the Gentiles came to him through symbolism. If you want to understand spiritual things you must come to understand the language of symbolism. It is vitally important! In your spiritual journey you are going to be confronted with it over and over. It is the language of the road.

Many road signs along the way will be in the form of symbolism. If you understand them, they will guide you and warn you.

Parables, riddles, dark sayings, allegories, dreams, visions, and proverbs have one thing in common; they are all written in the same language, the language of symbolism.

What is symbolism? It is a language in which inner experiences, feelings, and thoughts are expressed as if they were sensory experiences, events in the outer world. It is a language with its own grammar and structure. The word symbol is defined as something which stands in imagery for something else, especially something abstract.

Much of Jesus' teachings came through allegory and parables; much of the guidance from God came through this symbolic language.

I believe if more Christian people understood this language of symbolism there would not be as much division in the church. What causes such problems in the church are the different languages and misunderstandings. I am surprised by what I have

seen. There are so few differences between the Catholics and the Protestants in all their organized churches. They are alike in so many ways except one, their symbolic language. They all have their own symbolic language and forms of worship, but they are actually saying pretty much the same thing.

Remember these Scriptures, "But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And your young men shall see visions. And your old men shall dream dreams'." (Acts 2:16, 17)

This Scripture was spoken to the New Testament church. In fact, it was the very first message to the church, and God made it clear that He was going to use dreams, visions, and prophecy. These visions and dreams are usually given in images using the symbolic languages. If God made it clear that He was going to use these methods, shouldn't we take some time to look into them?

CHAPTER 12

PARABLES & DARK SAYINGS

"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old."
(Ps. 78:2)

"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted'." (Mt. 13:10-11)

We find parables are used very often in the Bible. It is for this reason that some men will understand and others will not. Why in the world would God want to withhold understanding from some people and want to give it to others? I believe it has something to do with the fact that God wants seekers. If a man is not seeking, he will not find. It also has to do with whether we are spiritual men or not. I don't believe a natural man can really understand the Bible no matter how long he tries. It takes a spiritual man to understand all the parables and dark sayings that are throughout the Bible.

The Bible often speaks to us in parables, but I don't think the use of them is limited to God alone. I don't think there is any real limit to their usage. Pastors and teachers use them. Parents use them. Men everywhere have found them to be a very effective means of teaching or communicating things to others. The devil can also use them.

Remember the Scriptures in Acts 2:16-17. God says that He shall pour forth of His Spirit upon all mankind, and as a result dreams, visions, and prophecies shall come forth. I want you to recognize that a dream can be a parable, a vision can be a parable, a prophetic word can be a parable; all of these things can be types of parables.

Let us take a closer look at parables. The word parable means a placing beside. Parables are short stories that teach a lesson, or they are obscure and enigmatic sayings. Familiar earthy objects are used to teach spiritual truths; like using sheep to represent people. Many times parables are allegories. Allegories are stories in which people, things, and happenings have another meaning.

Proverbs are enigmatical sayings in which a profound truth is cloaked. Now, what is a 'dark saying'? It is a mystery, a riddle, something concealed, a secret, something not easily explained or understood, and it causes people to seek for the truth of it.

I think we need to keep in mind that a parable can have several levels of meaning. This is where we need to be careful. It is very important as the Church that we should receive the spiritual understanding from these parables, allegories, dark sayings, etc. We must function from the spiritual man in our interpretation of all these things, including dreams, visions, and prophecies.

When a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed from the heart and that man begins to understand things in a new way. It may be things he has known for a long time, but he receives new understanding of these things.

"Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of

glory; but just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those that love Him.' For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." (1 Cor. 2:6-10)

The theme continues in 1 Cor. 2:12-16; "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things; yet he himself is appraised by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that we should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ." Note that Paul says, "A wisdom not of this age." The world at large does not have this wisdom today. Even with all its computers and vast storehouses of knowledge, and its brilliant men who can get into space; they lack this wonderful wisdom which only the spiritually mature may understand.

We, as children of God, should have a different understanding of things than the natural man of the world has.

For a long time, I have known that God uses man's intuition, but what I did not realize was God also uses man's imagination. I think most of us allow the devil more use of our imagination than we do God. What a great tool the imagination is for learning, if we only let God use it. I am sure most of you are aware that through the imagination you are able to form pictures right in your mind. I have heard statements many times, "Oh it is only your imagination. You didn't really see that. You didn't really hear that, you only imagined it."

What are we saying when we say that? We are saying that the imagination can see and hear. Supposing the imagination can indeed see and hear things the natural ear and eye cannot. Supposing the imagination can indeed be used by God, even as He uses the intuition.

When I discovered this truth about my imagination, I decided to allow God to use it. One day during a meeting, God began to show me something in my imagination.

I saw a large figure; I knew this large person represented God. He was bending over picking up small boxes that were all around Him. As He picked up each box, He would break it open and set it down again. Inside each box was a person and as soon as possible each person would fix his box and get back inside it again.

Next I saw several people standing around each holding a box in their left hand. With their right hand they were reaching up and grabbing a piece of God and trying to stuff Him into the box.

At this point, I heard God speak clearly, saying, "Men have always insisted on living in little boxes; and not only that, they are forever trying to put Me in a box, too. I refuse to get into their boxes. I am a big God and I am going to remain big. They don't seem to understand this. I am a big God and they are made in My likeness. I keep breaking their little boxes so they can become big like Me. But they insist on living in their little boxes. They always resist My Holy Spirit as He continually goes about trying to set them free. Men and their institutions and religious organizations are determined to remain small and isolated. They insist on trying to control and manipulate Me."

What I saw in my imagination was a parable, and the Holy Spirit told me what it meant. The Lord used this method while He walked here on this earth. He told a parable to the people. Later He

explained to His disciples what it meant. Don't be afraid to let the Holy Spirit teach you new things and then share them with others.

I believe it is very important that we understand what God wants to say to us. If He is going to speak in parables, then we need to understand them or be left in the darkness.

CHAPTER 13

WHAT ABOUT THAT?

One day I was teaching on dreams, visions, and prophesy. I was speaking about how important they are and how much we need them in the church today. After I had finished, a person came up to me and said, "I understand what you are saying, but I am frightened because of what happened to a friend of mine." Then she shared this story with me.

"My friend became interested in dreams because he had a lot of them. He began to read and to study and to learn how to interpret the dreams. When he realized that God was speaking to him through the dreams, he got into the dreams even more. Different people were telling him that they were not from God, but he would not listen. He became convinced that every dream was from God, and he began to do some weird things. He would not listen to anyone. He became involved in some strange things and he doesn't have much to do with the Christians anymore. Instead of reading the Bible and listening to other people who have it together, he now goes completely by his dreams. He says 'they are all from God', and you can't tell him any different."

This person continued, "I know what you say about dreams is true, that God has used them many times, but what about the person who has been totally misled by them?"

That was a good question. What about that? It does happen. People can be misled by someone or something. One thing I have learned in this Christian walk is that I don't have all the answers. But I know someone who does, the Holy Spirit. I wanted to know the answer to that question, too. So I asked the Holy Spirit, "What about that?" The Holy Spirit responded to me right away, so I could understand in my own heart and mind. I heard Him say, "What about this?" And He brought to mind several things that I had seen happen to different people.

The first one was an incident that happened to a family who had a sick child. Some well-intentioned Christians told them all they had to do was to stand on the word of God which says, "By His stripes we are healed". Well they did that. They stood on the word of God, "By His stripes we are healed." They told everybody that the child was healed. Every day the child became worse until he died. The family was devastated. The other people said, "You didn't have enough faith." After the child died they found it could have been very easily taken care of by the proper medicine.

Again the Holy Spirit said to me, "What about that?"

Now I don't want to get your attention onto the child dying. This kind of thing happens quite often and it is sad. But I want your attention on the fact that this was not a dream that misled this family, but a Scripture right out of the Bible. The point is this, a Scripture can mislead a person just as much as a dream.

The next situation that came to my mind was a family who had been prophesied over for ministry; they were to sell everything they had and go to a foreign country and minister. On the strength of this prophecy they did exactly that. They sold their home, their car, gave up their jobs and went to that country and almost starved to death. No ministry opened up. They came back home disappointed and broke, with no job. I am not saying that the

prophecy was wrong, any more than the Scripture was wrong. The problem in this situation was confirmation and timing.

Then the Holy Spirit again said to me, "What about that?"

Now I had the answer to the question, "What about that?" It is a biblical truth that God uses all these things: The Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, dreams, visions, prophecy, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, power and authority. But we must also know this, every one of these things can be misused and are abused!

Because they are misused, should we throw them out and not refer to them? No! Because the church would be defenseless and powerless. What is the outcome then? I think 1 Cor. 2:15 explains things very well, "But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man."

In many places the Scriptures tell us we are to test all things; to accept what is good and reject what is bad. I have noticed that many people in the Body of Christ, the church, want to think every voice is from God, every spirit is from God, every prophecy is from God, every dream is from God and every vision is from God. The truth is that they are not all from God, but some of them are.

Now if we can accept the idea that some of these things are from God, how are we to deal with them? With care! First we must determine, is this from the right spirit? Whether it be a sermon, a Scripture someone gives you, a dream you or someone else has had, a vision, a prophecy, you as an individual must decide if this is from the Spirit of God. It may seem far out or foolish and still be from God, or it may be very reasonable and sound great yet be from the wrong spirit.

The next thing we must do, after we have determined that it is from God's Spirit is to interpret the word, message, dream, prophecy, or vision properly. Even though it is from the right spirit, a person can

still be misled because of improper interpretation, so can the Body of Christ. Some people test the spirit properly and say, "yes, that is from God", but then they misinterpret and bring themselves and others into problems and pitfalls. Not all people are gifted in the same way. Some may be fortunate enough to be blessed with both discernment of spirits and interpretation, but many are not. Some have only discernment and others only interpretation. That makes us rely on one another. Make it a point of knowing those around you who have keen discernment. If you don't understand something, go to them and ask them to help you. If you have discernment but no interpretation, recognize those around you who God has put there with that gift. Go to them and ask for their help in interpreting things properly. Don't just guess at these things. They are important to you and to the Body of Christ.

There is yet another thing to be considered in this area of our Christian pilgrimage: It is God's timing. Many people down through the ages have heard from God, they tested the spirit, and it was the right spirit. They interpreted properly and understood what God was saying to them and they went out to accomplish it. The Holy Spirit does call people to sell all they have and go to foreign lands. He still does that today.

When my wife, Pauline, and I were baptized in the Holy Spirit, we both knew right then that God had a full time ministry for us. But the only thing I did was to open my home and start having a prayer meeting. Seven years went by before the Holy Spirit said, "Now is the time to go into full-time ministry." We were not surprised. We both knew it for all those years. In that seven year period the Holy Spirit had taught us, through a lot of mistakes I might add, to minister effectively.

Timing is important. Look in the Scriptures. Some of the things that God spoke thousands of years ago are just now taking place. I am not saying that the Holy Spirit doesn't sometimes want us to move

right off. He does. But there are other times when we are to wait. If we don't, we get ourselves into some awful messes.

I encourage all of you not to reject any of these things God uses so wonderfully, even if you don't understand them. Don't reject them, but pray for God to give you understanding and for the Holy Spirit to teach you how to use and do all these things. The Body of Christ needs to benefit from the use of them. Do not be too hard on others who are struggling to use their discernment and are making mistakes, but encourage them and help to pick them up when they fall and do things wrong.

I recall a couple whom I met in the South. They had been leaders in a prayer group for several years. They felt the Lord was speaking to them about starting a Christian community so they shared it with the rest of the group. The group did not go for it, so they did it alone. At first, people would come for ministry and stay a little while, but it gradually dried up. The whole thing came to a standstill until they were asked to vacate the place they were using. The Holy Spirit showed them that much of the ministry they had been doing was from their own zeal and spirit and not from the Holy Spirit. At this point in their lives they were ready to throw in the towel and have nothing more to do with spiritual things. They both felt an urging to return to the prayer group they had originally belonged to, but they were afraid. They felt it would be very humbling to admit they had been wrong in front of all their old friends; much of the ministering they had done was not of the Spirit. I urged them to return, simply because they now had more to offer this group than ever before. They had been through the fire and learned some very valuable things. They now had discernment of spirit; they had learned where the ministry was coming from, them or God. These people now had a humility they did not have before.

I know there are others who have had similar experiences, made similar mistakes. I urge you to go on now, and share what you have learned within the Body of Christ.

I think of another Scripture which says, "many are called but few are chosen." I now understand this differently than I used to. I believe it is saying, "Many are called, but few choose." God reveals Himself to many people in many ways. Some say, "Yes Lord, I accept You as my Lord and Savior," but there are few who really chose to follow and serve Him in humility and brokenness. The people whom I just spoke of, are at the place where they have to make a decision as to whether they are going to be the chosen which are few, or the called which are many.

Back to the question, "What about that?" What about the person who got all goofed up by dreams? What about the parents whose child died? What about the ones who sold all they had and went to foreign lands? What about the couple who started a community and it ended?

Our spiritual journey will come to a halt if we become full of fear; full of, "What about that." Adventuring with God requires us to learn from all these things and then go on and grow to a new level of maturity.

CHAPTER 14

THERE WILL BE A WAY

I have chosen a chapter in Isaiah to use now, because it illustrates our Christian pilgrimage from the desert to the promised land so well. Notice the use of symbolism by Isaiah.

"The wilderness and the desert will be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus. It will blossom profusely with rejoicing and a shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God." (Is. 35:1-2)

This Scripture is speaking about God's people living in a very dry desert, defeated, hopeless, and unfruitful. Yet, in spite of this, God is going to reveal His glory to them and through them. He is going to cause them to actually blossom profusely with rejoicing and become very fruitful.

When I use the term God's people I mean both the Jews, the called and chosen people of God, and the Church, the spiritual Jews.

At some point in the future I believe the Jewish nation will be glorified and the Church (the Body of Christ) will be glorified. But at this point in time I don't believe everyone enters into the same degree of victory or of holiness. It seems to rest on the individual; whether he or she takes advantage of the victory that Christ has given them and enters into it. The important thing is to ask yourself

how much victory are you walking in, how fruitful are you. Even if the other person has victory in his life it will not mean much if you don't.

Let me ask you another question. Do you feel like a dried up bone, like you are living in a desert? Then I want to encourage you. There is hope for you. Don't give up! There is a way that the Lord has prepared. It is a way of victory and fruitfulness, and it can be yours.

Notice that Isaiah is speaking about fruitfulness, not gifts and talents. The fruit of the Spirit seems to be very important here. If I were to rate the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit, I would have to put the fruit first and the gifts second. When we refer to the gifts, most of us think of something being manifested through someone to another. When we refer to the fruit, we think of something happening in us. I am not criticizing the gifts, they are very important. They should be desired and used, now more than ever; but the fruit of the Spirit is even more important.

The Scripture says you shall know them by their fruit. It is not speaking about the gifts of the Spirit. You can be fruitful in the use of the gifts of the Spirit and yet do nothing with the fruit of the Spirit. What was involved in the story of the Good Samaritan, the gifts or the fruits? Jesus talked about those who would come saying, "Lord, Lord, haven't we cast out demons in Your name and healed in Your name?" His reply was, "Be gone you workers of iniquity, I never knew you!" Why did He say this? Why was He angry? He was speaking to people who had the gifts of the Spirit but who bore no spiritual fruit. They had talents, but were not walking and living by the Spirit.

Some of us who are involved in the Charismatic or Pentecostal movement are prone to look down on others who don't seem to have any manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we take a second look at many of these people we find the fruit of the Spirit is present. They have love and joy in their hearts. They are

peaceful and patient with one another. They are faithful and kind, and they exercise self-control. These are the fruits of the Spirit.

To receive a miracle is great. To command demons to depart is great. To pray in tongues is wonderful, but to have the fruit of the Spirit pouring out of our lives every day is the greatest victory of all.

In Isaiah 35:3-4 we read, "Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with palpitating hearts, 'Take courage, fear not'. Behold your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you." On this pilgrimage we are often discouraged, disappointed, dismayed, despairing and defeated. That's why we need to help one another. Don't give up on each other or yourself. Remember the Lord said He will save you. I am sure that every one of you could tell how the Lord has intervened and "saved" you at difficult times. Well, know this; He will save you again and again. The Lord said, "I will save you." In another place He said, "Be strong and courageous; do not tremble or be dismayed, for I am the Lord your God and I am with you. I will not fail you or forsake you."

Isaiah goes on to say, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened. Then the lame will leap like deer and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah." (Is. 35:5-6)

Whose blind eyes? Whose deaf ears? Whose dumb tongue is He talking about? Yours and mine! We are blind when it comes to seeing spiritual things and understanding spiritual truths. We are deaf when it comes to hearing God's voice in the inner man and knowing the voice of the Spirit. We are dumb when it comes to praising and glorifying God and sharing our faith with the world. We are slow in encouraging one another in the Lord, and dumb when it comes to speaking the truth to one another in love.

Isaiah is encouraging us. He is saying, that at some point, the Lord is going to make us to see and to hear and cause us to speak. And not only this, but the dry desert areas of our lives will become fruitful and streams of living water will flow from our innermost being. Take courage and look up, for your redemption is drawing near. The victory is ours in Christ Jesus. We have a treasure in an earthen vessel, and that treasure is life. No one can take it from us. The devil cannot destroy it. Death cannot take it. The cross could not hold it, and now we have this life in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah continues, "And the scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes.

And a highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called 'the highway of holiness'. The unclean will not travel on it, and fools will not wander on it." (Is. 35:7-8)

Praise God! We are going to be, "pools of living water".

But what does he mean when he says, "in the haunt of jackals?" I believe it to mean, right inside of us where demonic powers have been at work destroying our lives.

Where is the battleground that these evil spirits work in? The battleground is our heart and mind. We can be led by the Holy Spirit and be victorious, or we can have no control over our mind and heart and be defeated again and again.

"When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came,' and when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Luke 11:24-26)

This Scripture is not hard to understand: An evil spirit leaves a man and the man is clean. The spirit returns and finds everything clean and in order. He leaves again and finds seven others and returns and they enter in and the last condition is worse than the first. Now suppose when the evil spirit returned he was not able to re-enter because the house was in order. Then he had to go and find seven others more evil than himself in order to break in and overcome the man.

Have you ever seen a Christian who seemed to be in worse condition after he experienced the Lord than he was before? I have! Quite a few in fact. These people had a real conversion experience. Then afterwards they became filled with confusion, anger, resentment, hardness of heart, and a host of other things. Their last condition was worse than the first. Now don't make the mistake of thinking that these people are not saved. If you don't separate a person's condition from their salvation, you will always have a problem. A person can be saved and in a sorry condition, and a person can be unsaved and be in fairly stable condition. Remember, the battleground is in the heart and the mind. If you don't allow these evil things in, you will not have an inner war to contend with.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine, and acts upon them may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock... And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand."

In the Body of Christ there are wise and foolish men. There are the victorious and the defeated. There are those who have learned it is wise to guard the mind and heart, and those who do nothing about it. For some it is still the haunt of jackals, but praise God not for all. Isaiah said, "Instead of jackals, there will be a highway of holiness." He also said, "The unclean will not travel on it, the fool will not wander on it."

What I am saying through all this? Your mind and heart are either going to be one or the other; a way of holiness or a haunt of jackals.

Isaiah goes on to speak more of this 'highway of holiness'.

In chapter 35:9-10, he says, "No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it. These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."

I like this part for it tells me there is a place where the devil and his demons cannot come. They cannot harass me or touch me in any way. It shows me there is a place of victory, where a man can walk in a way that pleases God. The uncleanness is gone and people have become wise and filled with joy and peace. These people have indeed entered into the promised place. They have found rest for their souls even while they are still in the world. There is indeed a banqueting table in the midst of their enemies. They are seated at this table partaking of the spiritual food which comes down from heaven and their lives are very fruitful.

Our pilgrimage should lead us from the desert to the promised place; where God's glory will be revealed in us and our hearts rejoice with gladness and joy.

CHAPTER 15

YOU MUST BE CAREFUL

"You must be careful", I have had this said to me many times in the past few years and it is true. But what are we to be careful of?

"Be of sober spirit; be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

Ephesians 6:10-13 says, "Finally be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

When must we be careful? All the time and in everything, the Scriptures say. But do we have to be afraid of the devil, of evil spirits, of everything? No! We should not be afraid of the devil or the evil spirits or anything else. The only fear that we should have is a good healthy fear of God. Apart from this, we should not live in fear. God never meant for us to live our lives in fear and terror. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." The word, timidity, has the same meaning as fear. We must not live in fear, but we must be

Careful to guard our hearts and minds and to put on the full armor of God to protect ourselves. Who is your enemy? The devil and his demonic beings. What do they want? Entry into your heart and mind. Who is to control your mind? Is it God? Is it the Holy Spirit? No. God has given us the responsibility to guard our own heart and mind; to choose what we will think on. If you don't, you are a foolish Christian, and you are going to be defeated over and over. You will never walk in victory.

Does your thought life control you? It should not. You should control your thought life.

Do your emotions and feelings control you? They should not! You should control your feelings and emotions.

The Bible says to think on these things. (Philippians 4:8) "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

We must be careful to choose good things to think on. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity."

There is a lot more timidity in the church today than there is boldness.

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." (Mt. 11:12) Many people do not understand this Scripture, but I take it to mean: Bold Spirit-filled men using the power and authority of God will defeat the devil and take their place in the kingdom of heaven.

Another Scripture that speaks of the same thing is Matthew 16:18. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

In this verse where it uses the word "gates", the meaning is power or authority. This means the power and authority of hell will not overpower the church.

Putting the meaning of these Scriptures together they say this: Bold spirit-filled men and women using the power and authority of God will break through and defeat the power and authority of the devil and enter fully into the kingdom life that God has for them.

One of the things that we must be careful of is that fear does not become rooted in us. Fear brings many people to a dead stop. They are afraid to make a mistake, afraid to step out in some new area of ministry, afraid to offend people, afraid to rock the boat, afraid to lead a Bible Study, afraid to teach, afraid of tongues, afraid of prophesy, afraid to go to some other church, afraid of their own pastor. I could go on and on. Did you notice that all these fears are within the church? I am sure that you might have some of these fears yourself, or know someone who does.

Don't be afraid to talk about controversial things, not in an argumentative way, but in a sharing way so we might all grow in understanding. It is not necessary for everyone to agree with you, but it is important that we all learn how to express ourselves. Your viewpoint is just as important as any other. It is time we in the church start expressing what we really think, instead of being so agreeable all the time.

Be careful that you are not overcome by fear right within your own religious group.

CHAPTER 16

A NARROW WAY

A parable in Matthew 7 teaches us to be careful to act upon the words from God that we hear: We are compared to a wise man and a foolish one, the victorious or defeated.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." (Mt. 7:13-14)

I want you to regard this Scripture as speaking to Christian people, not to the unsaved. Keep in mind there are many more defeated Christians than there are victorious ones. Only about ten percent of the church seems to have some kind of victory in their lives. I would put forward that there can be a wide way in the church and a narrow way. Or you could say a natural way and a spiritual way; or you could say a childish way and a mature way; or still better, a wise way or a foolish way. The narrow way is a combination of things: wisdom, maturity, fruitfulness, a guarded heart and mind, a way of holiness in word and action. The unclean, the fool, the unguarded heart and mind do not enter the narrow way even though it is very close by. But they walk the broad way, where destruction takes place. Confusion, evil words and action come forth to the injury of others, even loved ones and even to themselves. God help us.

Returning to Matthew 7:24 and 25 it reads. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them is a fool."

These Scriptures speak of the one who hears. So it is talking to those who have had the deafness removed from their ears. They are hearing the word of God! They are listening! They are going to church. They are listening to tapes and reading books and watching Christian TV. The problem is not the hearing. It is the acting; the applying of the truth they hear to their lives, the doing of it.

The Scriptures are quite clear that when it comes to building our spiritual house the responsibility is pretty much our own. Each one of us is going to be tested in this area. Those who have built with hay, straw and stubble or confusion, anger and resentment; they will suffer loss. Others will build with things of value, love, peace, joy and forgiveness; they will not suffer the loss. Laying the foundation is pretty much the responsibility of the church, the pastor, the teacher, the prophet. But whether we go on to spiritual growth and maturity is our responsibility, not the church. We must be careful how we build.

The other day, I heard someone use the Scripture, "Many are called but few are chosen." They interpreted it this way, "Many are called but few choose." I think this is what this person meant. Many people turn to the Lord and make some kind of decision to follow Him, but then after the first decision is made, they don't continue to obey the Lord day by day. They are hearers and not doers. They are fools and not wise men.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the

cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1-2)

Jesus came to bring a message, the "good news": We have been set free, we can have a walking, talking relationship with the Father in heaven, and the victory is ours through Him. We no longer have to be in bondage to sin. We can be healed.

He not only brought the message, but He showed through His actions and life that it was for real. He demonstrated the power of God. He set the captives free. He healed the broken hearted. He opened the eyes of the blind. He made the dead come to life. He walked and lived without sin. Then He told His followers to do the same, and He said, "I will be with you always."

They followed His example and did the same. John, Peter, Paul and many others down through the ages have gone out and preached the "good news" with signs and wonders following them. They were a demonstration of God's power and life. Paul finished out his work with this statement, "I have run a good race! I have kept the faith."

You might very well say, "I am not like them, I fall so many times." Well, let me tell you of someone else who failed miserably. His name is David, the man who was pleasing to God. And remember Peter: when Jesus was taken captive he denied Him three times. He failed again when he tried to walk on the water. Peter took his eyes off Jesus and he sank. We should learn a lesson from them. Every time we take our eyes off Jesus we sink. We probably have more failures in the church for this reason than from any other. We take our eyes off Jesus. The Scripture from Heb. 12:2 says, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus." Have you done that?

When you fix your eyes on something, it means that you not only look at the object, but your eyes remain on it steadily for a period of time. I am sure this Scripture means the eye of the heart, the

eye of the understanding, becomes set on Jesus permanently. I think it means the same thing as having a "single eye", or the opposite of being "double-minded".

When is it that we seem to lose sight of Jesus? Well, for me it is always in the worst storm. When everything goes wrong, I make the mistake of taking my eyes off Jesus and centering them on the circumstance, and down I go. When I am half drowned, I think of Jesus and He is always there to take my hand and quiet the storm.

Another Scripture tells us where the victory is; "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." (Col.3:1-2)

Brothers and Sisters, we must be careful to set the eye of our heart on Jesus permanently. The unguarded heart and mind do not enter the narrow way. The narrow way is victory and peace in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 17

OBSTACLES

In the book, "Pilgrims Progress", there were many obstacles along the way that hindered him and slowed him down. We have our share of them too, and some of them are pretty strange. But they keep us from entering fully into what God has for us. I want to touch upon a few of them now.

"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...Behold, I stand at the door and knock; and if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." (Rev. 3:13, 20)

I am certain this means that the Lord is to come first in all things and that the fullness of Jesus cannot be manifested in us unless we have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We cannot separate Jesus and the Holy Spirit. If we do, we end up with a form of godliness and no power. There are many in the church today in this condition. There were many in the early church who were also in that condition; the Galatian church, the Hebrew church, the Laodicean church. They were not allowing or accepting the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their lives, individually or corporately.

Why is it that whole churches can somehow be misled? One reason is because we are respecters of persons and position. I believe that we esteem men and their power and rank more than we esteem the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of 'fawning' going on in the church, or

maybe better labeled, 'respecters of persons'. The Scriptures tell us not to be respecter of persons, but in spite of that admonition many of us have. There is a healthy esteem and respect, and there is a sick esteem and respect. Many of us have a sick esteem and respect when it comes to a pastor, priest, or some well-known person. It can also be said the other way around. Pastors, priests and well-known people sometimes have a 'respecter-of-persons mentality' when it comes to people who can be of great use to them, who support them in a big way. I am not trying to put anybody down, I only want to point out a problem that exists in the church. These people with important positions stand in the door but don't enter in, and they don't allow others to enter in, either.

How can a person who holds a certain position stand in the door and stop you from entering in?

Is there a way of getting past them so they don't block our entering in? Yes, we can still enter in spite of them. It is their position or their teaching that is the block. If you refuse to accept their teaching and refuse to take their point of view, then you can go right on by. I am always amazed at how many people know all the answers for everyone else and yet they have no answers for themselves.

The Scriptures speak about people who are bloated up and think they are more important than they really are. Well, it is true! And some have landed in positions of leadership; they have been to college, they have been ordained, they have doctorate degrees. They have knowledge, but they have a problem, too. They are wise in their eyes. They think they have all the answers, and they don't. Watch out for these people; don't let them become the block in the door that keeps you from entering fully into all that God has for you.

I want to share some of the things that I have heard that, I think, can become blocks to your spiritual walk. In a sense, they do have

some truth and that is what creates the problem. This is what I hear:

"When you receive Jesus, you have everything." In a way this is correct, but in another sense it isn't. Another prominent concept suggests, "You are not filled with the Holy Spirit unless you speak in tongues." The Bible doesn't say this, but men do. The Bible says, "You will know them by their fruit." This is another one you often hear; "God speaks only through the elders." Other variations of this are, "If God has something to say to you, He will say it through us" or "God only speaks through the Scriptures." Another popular one, "You don't know how to interpret the Scriptures, we do." This is a very common one, "We don't need the gifts of the Holy Spirit now because we have the Scriptures", forgetting that the Jews had the Scriptures but still needed the Spirit of God.

What about this, "Who's your head?" or "Who is your covering?" This is one that I have been asked about many times. I know the answer. Jesus is my head, and His righteousness is my covering. Many are persuaded that the head and covering are a pastor or a priest, or a group of men, or some denomination. Because they believe this, it places them under their control.

This is a favorite one of many pastors and teachers; "You have to be fed." Yes, I agree that babies need to be fed, but grownups should learn to feed themselves.

Here is one which I often see written, "We preach the whole Bible", or "We preach the full gospel." Yet when you listen to some of these people you find them to be small, narrow, restrictive, and closed.

I am sure you have heard this one, "Our church is the only true church and if you don't join it, you will go to Hell."

Every one of these ideas can become an obstacle that stands in the door if we believe them or carry them too far. Many of these things are used against us in order to control us and keep us in line, by working through fear. The Holy Spirit does not control through fear. Watch out for this one; "Don't listen to anyone outside our denomination, or read anything by people outside our church. Listen and read only what we approve of so you will not be misled." What are they really saying? They are saying, "We know what is good for you, but you don't." You might hear this one, "We are responsible for your soul and spiritual life, so listen to us and don't ask any questions. Just do as you're told, and believe what we are telling you to believe."

I could go on with such statements, and I could tell you what I think of each one, but it is not important what I think. What is important is what you think. If any of these things are an obstacle to you, you need to search the Scriptures yourself. Look to the Holy Spirit to lead you into the truth and do not be respecters of persons or positions. Do not be controlled by fear or intimidated by others who think they know more than you do.

Brothers and sister, there are many statements like these in the Body of Christ. Don't accept every saying that comes along as gospel truth. Receive what might be good in it and that which is edifying. Reject that which is evil and controlling and manipulative. Don't let obstacles like these hinder your spiritual quest to come to know God and His son, Jesus Christ, and to enter fully into what He has for you.

CHAPTER 18

SPIRITUAL ADVICE

Some time ago a person came to me and asked "Must I always have a spiritual advisor?" From that time on, I have given this a lot of thought for this reason: I have talked with many people who have been misdirected by spiritual advisers, and I have talked with just as many who have been misdirected because they did not have someone to give them spiritual advice.

One has to learn and study to become knowledgeable, but one has to experience to become wise. Wisdom and knowledge are not the same thing. There are some men who are very knowledgeable and yet not very wise. There are other men who are very wise, but not very knowledgeable. What a blessing when a man has both!

Now to confront the question. I believe that we will always need good spiritual advice. But I do not think it should always come from the same person. None of us ever reach the place where we cannot use good advice. There is something else that has to be considered. Giving people advice and telling them what to do are two different things. A spiritual advisor is just that; he offers advice in spiritual matters. He does not make decisions for the person. He sticks to spiritual things. If he goes beyond that he makes himself something more than a spiritual advisor.

When this person asked me the question, I felt that the real issue was, "Do I always have to do what my spiritual advisor suggests?"

I would answer no! A man would be foolish to do everything someone tells them to do. They all too often can make mistakes.

We like to box God in. When we say this person or that person is my spiritual advisor, we are doing exactly that, limiting God. I have many spiritual advisors. When I feel the need for spiritual advice I look around and see who God has made available to me

Sometimes it might be a pastor or priest or elder, another time a brother or sister in the Lord; yet another time it could be someone in my own family. At still other times it might be someone outside of my family and church; people in the world who do not even profess Jesus as their Lord. I think all too often we have a spiritual advisor only because it is the thing to do, if we are really spiritual. Sometimes we may have one with an important name so we can tell others, "So and so is my spiritual advisor". This impresses them. You see, it adds to our stature. The more popular the person is the more stature we have. In other words, sometimes we play games with spiritual advisors.

Of course, there are times when we play the game the other way around: I am the spiritual advisor. Then I can tell others how many people I am advising. The result: You feel good about being the spiritual advisor for all those folks. It make you feel important and very spiritual.

I know these things do happen. We need to be aware of them and not get caught up in prideful things, which inflate our egos.

We need good spiritual advisors, and God has provided them. They are not very far away. It is often the one you least expect. Be knowledgeable and wise in this area. Don't be taken in just because someone wants to give people spiritual advice. Don't be taken in just because that is the thing to do. Don't rely on just one person or a leader in the church.

There are some who run to a spiritual advisor for every little thing. This is unnecessary. You waste their time and yours when you need to go directly to God with no one in between. At other times, things will just work out with time. Be wise in the use of spiritual advisors. They can, at times, cloud the issue and cause more problems and confusion than you already have. One other problem that arises in this area; don't have too many spiritual advisors or they won't be able to help you at all. They will only bring you more confusion.

CHAPTER 19

DESTROYING CITIES

I had a dream. I was attacking a city and another person was helping me. This other person was very vague but very destructive. I didn't really know why we were destroying the city, but I knew that I was to destroy it. We had very powerful weapons which did terrible destruction. The other person was doing much more damage than I was. We totally destroyed a city, then we went on to the next one. We destroyed that city in the same way until there was nothing left. We continued doing this till there was not one city left on the earth.

Then the dream changed. We were in heaven but this other person was still with me. At this point, I knew who the other person was. This vague figure represented the Holy Spirit. Now we were no longer tearing down cities; we were building one. It was a very large beautiful city, greater than any I have ever seen. It reached very high into the sky and I was aware that there was only one. At this point I woke up.

I knew this dream was from the Lord. I knew it even while I was having it. As soon as I awoke, I prayed for the interpretation and the Lord gave me an understanding. It had to do with the purpose of our ministry. We were to tear down the enemy strongholds that keep so many people away from knowing the Lord. These strongholds can be any number of things, but they are basically made up of things that keep us in the darkness; that keep us from

living in the truth. There are lies that we believe are truth. These are false practices of Christianity with no real spiritual life behind them. They can be doctrines and dogmas of men. They might be simply the cares of the world which leave no time for spiritual life. The cities on earth represent all the things of our lower life, our carnal life.

They represent all the things that stand in our way; they keep us from entering into the spiritual life that God intended for us to have.

The next part of the dream, the building up the large, beautiful city in heaven, represented building up our spiritual life to the level it should be. Notice that the old cities had to be destroyed before the new one was built. This is a truth that runs through the Bible; you cannot serve two masters. You can serve your carnal nature or your spiritual nature but not both at the same time. There are carnal values and there are spiritual values. They differ from one another so much that you cannot serve both at once.

The other figure who was in the dream was very important. He did most of the destroying. He worked with me in the tearing down and destroying of the cities and in the building up of the city in heaven. This means we need the Holy Spirit to help us. We cannot do it alone. We need the Holy Spirit to help us root out the old, carnal, earthly strongholds, and we need Him to help build up our new spiritual house. Apart from Him we cannot do either one. Notice in the dream that both of us, the Holy Spirit and I, were busy both tearing down and building up. This again is a spiritual principle. The Holy Spirit will do nothing alone. He will not destroy the old if you don't work with Him. He will not build up the new if you don't work with Him.

If we try with all our strength to do it alone, we will get nowhere. The Holy Spirit without our help will do nothing. What is the outcome? We have to work together with the Holy Spirit, and if we

do, the old cities are destroyed and our spiritual house quickly grows. Remember that God desires the dry desert area of our life to blossom and for streams of living water to flow from our inner most being.

CHAPTER 20

"TO BE KNOWN"

The statement "I do not know you" comes from The Parable of the Ten Virgins. What are these words saying to us? Do they mean that we can be washed in the blood of the lamb, be called by God and still not be known by Him?

This simply cannot mean that God does not know us. He does. He knows every thought in our minds, every action that we do. He knew us before we were born, while we were yet in our mother's womb. This passage has to mean something different from that. I believe it is speaking of a close intimate relationship, something like two close friends might have. Could it mean something like this? We were never close friends, we never had a close relationship together. You never really drew close to me or allowed me to draw close to you?

I think of the Scripture in 1 John 1:6-7, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son cleanses us from all sin." This Scripture is tying together our walk with God and our walk with one another. It is saying we can not separate the two. If we have a close walk with God, we are in a close walk with one another.

How do we have a close walk with one another?

How do we have a close walk with God?

These Scriptures are saying if you have one, you have the other. This fits in very well with Ephesians 4:1-3, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Continuing on, in verse 13, we read, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ."

You will notice throughout the Scriptures that, "fellowship with God" or "knowing God" goes hand in hand with "fellowship with one another" and with "maturity". It also goes together with "unity of the Spirit" and with "walking in the light" or "truth".

Notice that whenever "babes" or the "immature" are mentioned there is a problem with unity in the Spirit. There was strife, envy, deceit and every evil thing present. In Hebrews 5:11, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." In Galatians 3:1 they were "bewitched and deceived". In 1 Corinthians 3:1 they could not be spoken to as spiritual men but as to babes, and there was strife and immorality among them.

I am aware of this: If I am to have the kind of fellowship that God wants me to have, it can only come about at the spiritual level; my spirit must come into unity or "contact" with your spirit. Your spirit must come into "contact" or unity with mine. The same thing holds true with God. If I am to "know God" my spirit must come together or "mix" with God's Spirit. God's Spirit must come together and mix with mine. We find the Scriptures urging us to function in this way.

These Scriptures in 1 John are trying to make us see a truth. There are several comparisons. What are these Scriptures trying to show us? I believe they are trying to show us what a lot of other Scriptures are trying to show us, whether we are walking in the Spirit or in the flesh, in the darkness or in the light. The Scriptures show us if we are on the right track or not.

John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ who thou hast sent." If we don't see from the Scriptures that God has one ultimate purpose in mind then we are blind. What is this ultimate purpose? It is for us to have fellowship with God, and to have fellowship with one another as free spirits.

Did God send His Son just to remove our sin? No! Did He send His Son just to save us? No! God sent His Son because He loved us. God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son. Let me word it in a different way. God so loved the world that He wanted to be united with it. In order to be united with it, the sin of the world had to be dealt with.

If we are to "know" another person, then we must become as one spirit with that person. 1 Corinthians 2:10-13 is very clear. Only the spirit of a man is able to know the thoughts and depths of that man. The very reason that God sent His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, was so you and I could "know" Him, so you and I could know the thoughts and the depths of God Himself.

Paul made it very clear that even when he was in prison, he was with them in "spirit". How else could he have written to the churches, knowing exactly what their problems were?

1 Corinthians 2:15 explains it very well. "But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man." What does this mean? It means that he who is spiritual can walk in the light and keep from being deceived. The spiritual man can discern

things properly because the natural man cannot keep things hidden from him. You will notice from the Scriptures that Jesus always knew the hearts of men, their deeper desires and motivations. How did He know this? Because He always functioned from His spirit and was able to appraise properly.

If a man comes up to me and says, "I want to know you", can he get to "know" me without some, or possibly all of my willingness to let him know me? What I am saying is that another person cannot "know" me unless I want him to, because my response to his "I want to know you" is the key as to whether it can happen or not.

Instantly, when we say, "I want to know you", we have passed the ball to the next person in the game. Then it depends upon that person as to whether the game continues or not. That person can toss the ball back or decide that he doesn't want to play ball. Or he can say, "I am not interested in knowing you, or you knowing me".

I wonder when we say, "I want to know you," if we really are trying to say, "I want you to know me"! In a similar way, I believe that if we could only discern God's heart or hear what God's voice is saying, we would hear something like this, "I want 'you' to know Me. I want you to know My heart and My mind and the very depths of My being".

What is the reason for a spiritual quest? Is it not to come to know God here and now and to be "known" by Him?

CHAPTER 21

OPEN HEART

Most of us come from some kind of religious background. If I were to ask you to define a religious person, you would immediately think of a person who prays a lot, goes to church often, doesn't swear; that person might be a priest or minister, maybe a nun. Others might define them as a fanatic or a nut.

The Bible defines pure and undefiled religion in James 1:27, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Can a person "defile" his religion? Most certainly. The very fact that the word is used tells us it can happen. What about the scribes and the Pharisees? Were they practicing defiled religion? I think Jesus made it quite clear that they were. He told them that on the outside they were all cleaned up, but on the inside they were full of dead men's bones and every unclean thing. This means that pure religion has something to do with a man's heart, the deeper part of a man's being.

If we follow the footsteps and the words of Jesus, we see over and over pure and undefiled religion. We also see Him expose defiled religion time and again. Why is it that Jesus would go to such extent to expose pure and defiled religion? He did it for our benefit.

Because we keep getting caught up in defiled religion, He wants us to clearly see the difference.

One of the parables which shows so clear this difference is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Notice what happened before He spoke the parable in Luke 10:25-37, "And behold a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'

And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?'

And he answered and said, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.'

And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.'

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

Jesus replied and said, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead.

And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them

to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you'.

Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?

And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same!.'

I want to probe into this teaching a bit more and "see" what God is saying to us. Remember parables are put forth in such a way that some men will "see" by them and others will not. Some will understand and others will not.

To begin with, what brought the parable forth was a question from a lawyer, one who studies the Law. The question was, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" From this, we know the parable was an answer to this question.

Next, Jesus asked him a question, "What does the Law say?" Apparently the Law itself has the answer to the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It also follows that the parable is saying the same thing as the Law. What did Jesus say about the fulfillment of the Law? If you love one another, the Law is fulfilled!

Remember now, the Scriptures say eternal life is to "know" Him, to be in a spiritual union with Him. This parable is pointing out that eternal life also has something to do with our neighbor. The parable shows us that "eternal life" has to do with both our relationship with God and with man. The Ten Commandments also say love both God and man! If we start trying to approach God through religion without loving our neighbor our religion is instantly defiled.

We find this lawyer wanted to know who his neighbor was. Who should he love? I think this parable makes it quite clear who our

neighbors are. They are the people around us in our everyday life who are wounded and hurting, the ones who are at the side of the road; the ones that we meet in our daily lives who need our help.

The Scripture goes on to talk about a certain priest. He is like some religious people we all know. They profess to know God and to serve God. Back then the priest were to serve the people, as it is today. But this man saw the wounded man and went on by. Right at this point, that priest's religion became defiled; he professed to love God but did not love his fellow man. He was deceiving himself and did not "know" God.

The next person who came along was a Levite. The Levites were set apart for special service. From them came the Levitical priesthood. This man's religion was in vain also. He passed by the wounded man and his religion became defiled. You will note over and over that Jesus tried to make the religious people of His day see and understand clearly. There seems to be no people on earth more blind than those who practice external religion and don't know God.

Next, came along the Samaritan. What does he represent? The outsider. The Jews would not even speak to them. As far as they were concerned, the Samaritans could not know God or have anything to do with Him. The Jews reasoned that they were the only called and chosen people. Yet this Samaritan had compassion and went to the wounded man and met all his needs. He loved him. He fulfilled the Law.

What is this trying to show us? We do not have to be externally religious to love one another. We don't have to belong to a select group to love one another or to serve one another, but we must have compassion in our hearts. We must be willing to "know" one another, to enter into one another's problems, to unite with one another, to involve ourselves in other people's lives. By doing this,

we open ourselves up to really "know" God, to love God in a very real way.

I believe there is a little defiled religion in all of us. We need to acknowledge it and pray that the blindness will be gone from us. I also believe for all of us who profess Jesus Christ as our Lord, our greatest single enemy which we need to watch out for is not sin, but falling into the trap of "defiled" religion. By becoming very religious outwardly and having no heart for God or the people around us we defile our religion.

CHAPTER 22

AUTHORITY IS A PAIN

Authority has always been a problem and I suppose that it will be for some time yet. Many people have a problem with authority in the church: Who is the authority? Who am I to listen to? There are voices all round us saying, "Listen to me. I am the voice of God. I am the authority of God. The Bible is the authority of God. The Pope is the authority of God. The Bishop is the authority of God. The Law is the authority of God. The pastor is the authority of God. The elders are the authority of God."

Because of the many voices of authority, some people have simply picked one and said to themselves, "I choose to accept this voice as the authority of God." They have done this to preserve their sanity and their faith. Whether the "voice" they are listening to is right or wrong doesn't seem to matter much to them, because at least they have some stability instead of being in constant confusion.

The truth of the matter is that there are many voices of authority in the church. As members of the Body of Christ we must recognize them; and not only that, we must know which one we should be listening to at a given moment. In fact, at certain times in our lives, there has to come a total change of authorities for us. This causes much "pain", and it is a serious difficulty for many people in the church.

In the Scriptures you will see that men had a problem with Jesus because He did not recognize the same authorities they did. He was hearing and obeying a different 'voice'. Because He was hearing and obeying a different 'voice', those in authority in the synagogue wanted to kill Him and made plans to do so. Jesus is not the only one who has been persecuted for listening to a different 'voice'. Every man and woman down through the ages who listened to a different 'voice' has had to face the same thing with the other authorities. It is suggested by the authorities that, "If you are not for me you are against me."

Another man who is a perfect example of this is Saul (later known as Paul). He was a Pharisee and blameless under the Law. He went around encouraging the killing and imprisonment of the Christians. He was under authority, so that made it all right. Here again we find authority to be a problem and a 'pain'. I wonder how many thousands of people have been killed because of someone under authority, and I mean church authority. We find authority is not always good; it can be downright dangerous and destructive.

Are people still being killed today by authority? Certainly! Note how Jesus interpreted the Law, "Thou shalt not kill". If you call a person an evil name and speak evil things of that person, you are killing him. Every one of our churches have their share of guilt and most of us have our share of guilt also.

I don't want to dwell on this; I only want to make this point: the use of authority is not always edifying.

Getting back to Saul: Here is a man who has always been under authority. Suddenly one day struck down on the highway by a light from heaven and blinded. A voice says to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul asked, "Who art Thou Lord?" And the voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and it shall be told to you what you must do."

Here is a man who has suddenly come under a new authority. As a result of this new authority, much pain will come into his life; the authority that he served before is going to turn against him. But the difference will be made in his life by this new authority; before Saul was bringing death, now he will be bringing life.

I find this principle to be true. A person who is under authority to bring life will be constantly at warfare with the authority who brings death. The old authority will try to kill you in any manner it can.

Saul, now Paul, found himself in an awkward situation. His former friends want to kill him and be rid of him. To them, he was a deserter. The Christians wanted nothing to do with him because they did not trust him. He has a problem with Peter, because Peter was being a hypocrite and bowing down to the wrong authority. Peter's problem is similar to many of our problems today. We would rather bow down to the wrong authority than be rejected.

Somewhere along the way, each one of us has to make a decision. I think all of us face this at one time or another. We have to decide what authority we are going to listen to. There are two major authorities in the church; both from God. One is the hierarchy made up of the bishops, elders, pastors, deacons and so forth. The other is the Holy Spirit Himself.

One of these authorities can be, and often is, misused and abused. The other one is never misused or abused, and indeed it cannot be. It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never misuses or abuses the authority that God has given Him.

These two authorities are both God-given for the good of the church, but they do not always agree with one another. You will see examples of this in the Bible.

There are times in our lives when we must acknowledge and accept the authority of the hierarchy and function under it. There are other times when we must recognize the authority of the Holy Spirit and be obedient to it. As people who have come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, accepting Him as our Lord and Savior, been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and received some measure of spiritual growth, we should now be led by the Holy Spirit.

Before you came to "know" Him you could not be 'led by the Spirit'. Now that you do "know" Him, this should no longer be a problem.

The Lord has a special work, a special calling for every one of us. Some of us are called to work through the institutional church; others are called to work pretty much independently from the institutional church. Each one of us must be faithful to the calling God has given us. In fact we should be an encouragement to one another. Is not one called to plant and one called to water and another called to harvest? Why is it we are so blind and narrow and insistent that we all be alike?

In the Old Testament there is a Scripture which says, "Who is as blind as My servant? Who is as deaf as the one that I send"

If you are called to serve the institutional church, do it with everything within you. If you are called to serve outside the church system, do it with all you have. You are not called to answer to one another. Each of you have to answer only to God. We all have enough pain. We don't need to cause each other anymore than necessary. Bear with one another. Be gentle with one another. Forgive one another. Keep the unity of the faith. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Boast in the Lord. Love one another; respect one another. Do and speak only that which is

edifying to one another. If you do these things, you will bring pleasure to the Father's heart.

CHAPTER 23

IT IS FINISHED

Jesus said, "It is finished", just before He died on the cross. What did He mean by this statement? I believe He meant this; "My work is done, I have finished that which My father sent me to do," Just what was it Jesus was to do? Hebrews 10:9 makes it very clear, "Then He said; 'Behold I have come to do thy will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second."

In my own words I think this means: Jesus came to do the Father's will which was to fulfill the old covenant and bring in the new covenant.

I don't believe the new covenant could come into effect until the old covenant was fulfilled. The Bible is quite clear that all Scriptures must be fulfilled. The work of Jesus was to fulfill the old covenant so it could be brought to an end. Then when He had fulfilled the old one, His work was to usher in the new. But in order to usher in the new covenant everything which stood between God and man had to be removed; every barrier, every separation, every sin. Jesus had to reconcile God and man.

Why did Jesus have to remove everything that separated God and man? Let me put it another way. Why did Jesus have to unite God and man? And how did He do it?

First, He fulfilled the old covenant. He lived a life without breaking the Law. When He became the spotless Lamb, He offered Himself as a sacrifice, the spotless lamb that takes away the sin of the world. Hebrews 10:10. "By this will we have sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Sanctified means to make holy, to consecrate, to purify, to free from sin.

Why did man have to be sanctified or made holy? So that God could write the new covenant in his heart.

Remember the new covenant is not written in tablets of stone but in tablets of the human heart. Because the human heart was separated from God, it had to be reconciled back to God before the new covenant could be written in it.

When Jesus said, "It is finished." He meant, "OK Father, You can write in their hearts now. The old is finished and the new is made ready. You can now move into their hearts and take up residence."

As people on a spiritual quest we need to hear the Father's living word written in our hearts daily. The new covenant must be operating in us.

CHAPTER 24

MOVING ON WITH GOD

I like Ephesians 4, because the Christian's walk is revealed so clearly in these few verses. I don't think there is any place in the Bible where Christian maturity is seen and expressed as well.

Ephesians 4:1-7, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Then it continues in Ephesians 4:11-16, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the friendship of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the

whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

This is speaking about the person who has learned to use his gifts and talents to the fullest, for the building up of the Body of Christ. This person has reached the place where every wind and wave doesn't wipe him out, and he has become aware that not every man in the Body of Christ has pure motives and intents. But this does not blow him away either. He continues to function properly just the same. He has become aware that every doctrine in the church is not correct, yet he still functions in spite of it. He brings forth good fruit from the depths of his heart because he is rooted deeply by springs of living water. His leaves never wither. He brings forth fruit in his season. The leaves are healing to the nations, for this man is rooted in the rock, Jesus Christ.

These next verses set it off so well. Ephesians 4:17-24 says, "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart. And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Paul over and over used the expressions, "I have learned" and "Do you not know." I have learned that it does not pay to harbor resentment, envy, jealousy, unforgiveness or any other thing in my

heart; if I do, it poisons me. I have learned that it is not good for me to have a hard heart toward men or toward God. Paul said, "My heart is wide open, but yours is closed." We need to know the condition of our heart, whether it is open or closed.

These Scriptures are speaking of a man who has learned to keep his heart wide open to man and to God, and still not be taken in by men. It is speaking of a man who has reached maturity. He doesn't have to be evangelized over and over anymore. It is speaking about a person who does not have to be supervised every moment by a pastor. It is speaking about a person who has learned discernment and how to stand firm in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is speaking of a person who does not have to be taught all over again the basic principles of the kingdom of God. It is speaking of a person who is able to go out into the world in the most perverse situations and stand strong in the Lord Jesus Christ regardless of what the world or devil has to throw at him.

A closed heart will slow down and bring to a stop our spiritual growth. It will hinder and bind us, until the flow of God's life within is quenched. We become a parched desert land again and unfruitful again. We are unable to move on with God toward His goal for us.

Let us be people on a spiritual quest, with all boldness and courage seek the city from above.



The bible tells us we are strangers and pilgrims. That this is not our home, we are just traveling through.

Many people today are on a spiritual quest or journey to find new meaning to life.

I remember a travel agent once telling me that when you go on a trip, be aware that you are going to run into problems and disappointments. But if you expect difficulties and keep a right attitude your trip need not be a failure.

This book will help you on your spiritual quest so you will have a right attitude. It will keep you from becoming disappointed and make your spiritual journey a success.