

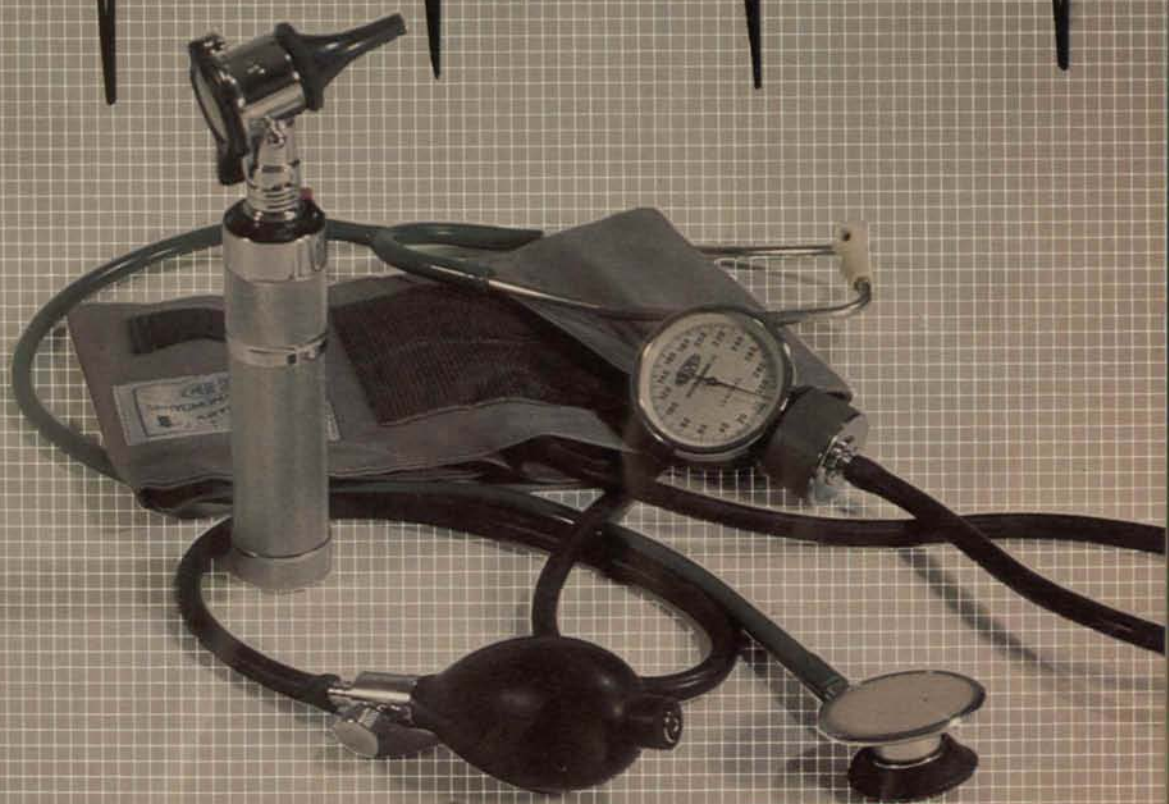
Magazine **New Wine**

November 1981

The Christian's Vital Signs *Basic Indicators of a Vibrant Faith*



Featuring an interview
with Larry Christenson



Living by a Power Beyond Our Own
Why Are You Doing What You Are Doing?

EDITORIAL



Traditional vows in the marriage covenant bind both bride and groom together "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health." Sometimes we need to be reminded that our personal covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ suffers these same inevitable strains. No Christian can totally escape those dreary times when personal spiritual life is at a low ebb, when our spiritual "vital signs" indicate all is not well between us and the Lord.

In most cases we ourselves are aware of the situation because of many obvious symptoms. Our devotion disappears, our faith falters and our enthusiasm evaporates. Gloom replaces gladness, criticism overwhelms compassion and selfishness replaces service to others. Buffeted by such negative forces, we experience in some measure what John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress* referred to as the "slough of despond" and

what the medieval saints called "the dark night of the soul."

Upon honest reflection we see how the enemy of our souls has craftily laid a network of subtle traps, each neatly designed to keep us from the precious spiritual resources needed to maintain a healthy spiritual life. To name a few:

The General-Manager-of-the-Universe Trap: "Lord, I have so much to do, I can't spend time with you or the family."

The Procrastination Trap: "Lord, I'll pray and read my Bible tomorrow."

The Self-Indulgence Trap: "I need to relax and have more fun. A man can't be religious all the time."

The Tyranny-of-the-Urgent Trap: "Lord, this immediate crisis requires all my time and energy. I'll get in touch with you as soon as I get past it."

The Exhaustion Trap: "Lord, I'm too tired to worship, pray and read my Bible."

The Self-Pity Trap: "Lord, I believe in forgiveness, but this time I've been treated too shamefully."

Ironically, all these traps are neatly laid in the center of genuinely important tasks and responsibilities. We need to confess that when we find ourselves in deep spiritual doldrums it is often our own fault. Through carelessness or negligence we've strayed away from God's grace and protection. As one man put it, "If you don't feel close to God, remember: He's not the one who moved." In other words, it is our responsibility to recover our own spiritual health; and that is what this issue of *New Wine* is all about.

We trust that the basic, positive articles in *New Wine* this month will be both instructive and encouraging in helping you maintain a healthy relationship with the Lord.

Don W. Basham

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Editor

NOVEMBER 1981



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The Christian's Vital Signs



an interview with
Larry Christenson

NW: What comes to mind when you think of the vital signs of a healthy Christian life?

LC: When you talk about the vital signs of a Christian, I think of a person who has been in an accident. The immediate question is, "Are his vital signs there?" It occurs to me that one thing that confirms whether a person is going to be all right is if he is *oriented* as opposed to being *disoriented*.

If a person is disoriented, it's obvious that there is something in his neurological system that isn't functioning properly. I think there are three signs of a Christian being oriented as opposed to being disoriented, keeping with the analogy of someone who has been in some kind of trauma. If you find a person who doesn't know *who he is*, or *where he lives*, or *what he does for a living*, you have a person who is disoriented.

It seems to me that a Christian is oriented first of all in that *he knows who he is*. That comes partially from knowing who he was, but is no longer, through the grace of Christ's forgiveness. In addition, he has an expectant, positive attitude toward the future as well as the present because he is in communication with the Lord to whom he belongs, and with the Lord's family. The key word that comes to me in that regard is *identity*. One of the vital signs of a well-oriented Christian who knows who he is is that he has a sense of his identity.

The second vital sign is that *he knows where he lives*. In a very practical sense, he knows where he belongs in terms of the local body fellowship. He also knows that he belongs in the world of the Scripture, because that is where his meals are served up to him and where he receives his nourishment. The key idea here is a sense of belonging; a vital sign of a well-oriented Christian is that he has a clear sense of belonging.

The third vital sign is that *he knows what he does for a living*, and that speaks of his ministry, gift and calling. The key word there would be *ministry*.

It would seem to me that a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of ministry are vital signs for a well-oriented Christian—evidences that he is not disoriented. A disoriented person may be able to move around and function after a fashion, but he's actually out of touch with reality.

NW: In other words, he's alive but not really living?

LC: Right. He can be walking around and even communicating, but there is something missing—he is disoriented. I think there are many Christians who are walking around making sounds as if they were normal, but they are disoriented.

NW: What are the basic areas in which you feel a Christian needs to "keep in shape" to continue growing toward maturity?

LC: What I have found most important in my own life and with the people in our congregation are two areas that I think most everyone would cite: prayer and the Word. Those two areas are the

very priorities that the apostles set for themselves in Acts 6:4: "But we will give ourselves continually to *prayer*, and to the ministry of the *Word*." I include the congregation in my answer to the question because I believe that the life of the congregation is a rather accurate barometer of the prayer life and the life in the Word that the pastor and the leaders have.

Under the category of "the Word" I would naturally put the Bible first. But I have also found that important books which seem to come at just the right time, or important teachings that I hear at a conference or on a tape, have a lot to do with keeping in shape. I have met people who say, "I only read the *Scripture*." That has not been my experience. Very often I have been influenced by a word which is based on Scripture, but illuminated through teaching. In other words, the teaching ministries in the Church have a recognized function in bringing growth.

Of course, the Scripture itself has shaped my life in a fundamental way, particularly when I have really "dug in" and done considerable study. For example, I once did a study of the book of Hebrews for a whole year, examining it verse by verse in the original Greek. That had a significant effect upon my life.

But those two areas—prayer and the Word, including the Bible and scriptural teaching—are the ones that come to my mind as basic areas in which every Christian needs to "stay in shape."

NW: *People often are unable to maintain a regular routine of prayer and Bible study. Are there some helpful hints or secrets that you personally have found effective in your growth as a Christian?*

LC: My answer to that may only reflect my personality and not a general rule for anybody else, although I tend to believe it has broad application. My answer would be summed up in just one word: *discipline*. Discipline has done more for my ongoing life as a Christian than any other thing I could put my finger on. I'm speaking, of course, in terms of what God calls me to do as opposed to what I have *received* by way of inspiration or faith. In terms of what I *do* as a Christian, it has been necessary to lead a disciplined life.

For me, that usually means that I have a regular morning schedule of exercise, prayer, Bible study and family devotions. I may put in two or three hours at the beginning of the day on those basic disciplines, and that requires getting up rather early. But at the end of that time, I am ready to launch into whatever is on the immediate schedule with a sense of having given priority attention to my relationship with the Lord, and stewardship of my body, mind, spirit and family relationships. I would say that discipline has been the biggest help to me in those respects.

Something else I have noticed is significant. We all hit the "downers"—dry spells in the Christian life—and I don't know of any way to avoid them.

But what I have observed is that continuing in the normal disciplines of life tends to bring us through those periods more quickly so we don't just wallow in them. When I encounter a whole series of negative circumstances in my life, I've found that just plugging away at the regular daily routine seems to bring me through much faster than if I indulge the misery.

NW: *Do you think one of the problems we encounter is the modern mentality of expecting everything to come easily?*

LC: Yes. We are accustomed to the quick, instant deal. And we are very "result oriented." A more helpful mentality would be, "Today, I will be faithful to the Lord, letting him bring to fruition what is ripe in my life and what will lead me on." Our orientation must be more faithfulness in our relationship with the Lord than toward easy, instant results in our lives.

To me, responding to the Lord's presence is more and more a key to the whole Christian life. As it says in the Psalms, "I keep the Lord always at my right hand." When I go jogging first thing in the morning, I usually recite that verse, and I mentally envision the Lord beside me. (This is a time when I do most of my intercessory prayer.)

We need that daily confidence that the Lord is with us. Even though we don't know all the things that He has in store for us that day, recognizing that He is with us is sufficient to assure us that He has this day in hand and we can walk it out with Him.

NW: *From your experience as a pastor and teacher, what do you think are the most common problems Christians encounter which keep them from staying close to the Lord in the way you just described?*

LC: As I consider people I know who once walked with the Lord and then fell away, a common denominator I frequently recognize is that they have been "sitting in the seat of scoffers." They might not be literally "scoffing," but they are basically associating with people who manifest a spirit of negativism, grumbling, skepticism, or scoffing. They are caught up in an environment that undermines their relationship with the Lord.

When I see people who seem to be "under a cloud," I begin to ask questions such as "What kind of things have you been reading lately?" "Where



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have you been?" "Who has been with you?" Once as I talked to a woman who was beginning to become negative, I realized that she was in daily contact with another person who was very negative and I asked her, "What well are you drinking



from?" Actually, her problem was that spiritually she was just drinking from a poisoned well.

NW: *In other words, that person basically assumes a position of doubt rather than faith, doesn't he?*

LC: Yes. If you tolerate grumbling, give ear to criticism, and become a listening post for negativism, it cannot help but produce doubt in your spirit.

Another common obstacle, of course, would be some particular sin that a person tolerates and allows to fester without dealing with it.

Another frequent problem is illustrated by the parable of the sower and the soil: the cares of this world. I have met men and women, for instance, whose job simply moved in and took over their lives. Jobs very often become a real competitor to the priority we should give to the Lord.

NW: *What should a person who is caught in this position do to remedy it?*

LC: A powerful antidote to this kind of temptation is commitment to the Lord and His Body. I believe that many people who get into this situation still feel that they love the Lord, but they begin to avoid their Christian brothers and sisters, who now appear too legalistic and demanding. They forsake the "assembling of themselves together" and all which that implies.

Basically, I believe Christian commitment is very similar to marriage—you must be totally committed to that person at every level of your relationship. To become committed to Christ re-

quires commitment to a local body of believers. That body isn't perfect, because no fellowship is perfect. But we have to make this commitment: "Here is where I am, where I will contribute, where I am going to drink the 'water of life' and get the nourishment I need. I am committed to the Lord and this body of believers, and it is here that my commitment will be walked out in reality." It seems to me that most people I have seen who drift away have lost interest in the Body of Christ.

NW: *But that, too, is a matter of discipline, isn't it?*

LC: Right, because a local body isn't always that exciting. A large part of commitment is rather routine. But as in marriage, you are committed to your partner for the normal, ordinary days as well as for the exciting ones.

NW: *I know you could answer this next question with a book, but could you briefly give steps in seeking and finding God's will concerning a matter?*

LC: I have recently done a tape series dealing with that topic from a particular perspective. I covered a list of paradoxes in Scripture which have sometimes puzzled people in terms of guidance, but which can be understood as a real way of finding the Lord's will. In that series, I came up with three words that for me summarize the process.

The first is *counsel*. To find God's will, it is necessary to seek counsel, and that of course includes counsel as it is recorded in the Scriptures. In addition to that is the counsel of those that know that scriptural record and also know my present situation. So if I am going to find God's will I must first be counseled by Scripture and by fellow Christians.

The second word is *consensus*. The Lord brings those who are seeking His will to unity or consensus. We feel right and comfortable that He has revealed His mind to us in a particular regard.

The third word is *confirmation*. Because we know it's possible to hear imperfectly, in spite of counsel and consensus, we ask the Lord to confirm what we've heard in ways that will give us the confidence to step out in faith. Then, perhaps by circumstance, or by prophetic utterance or in various other ways, the Lord will confirm what we have heard through previous counsel and consensus.

These three words describe the basic process we follow for determining God's will, both in our Church Council and also in our personal and family decisions.

For instance, my wife and I are now facing the prospect of doing much more travel in the next year or two. That has been a real matter of prayer to determine if this is actually what the Lord has in mind for us. In making the decision, the process I've just described is basically the one we have followed. We have counseled with the elders in the congregation, with each other and with some people from outside with whom I counsel regular-

ly. We have come to a consensus, and now we have begun to see the Lord confirm it in interesting ways, such as letters and conversations with various people.

NW: *With all this in mind, what in your opinion is the most important ingredient for a Christian's growth?*

LC: Well, I'll give you a good Lutheran answer, and that's *faith*. By that I mean an expectation of God's daily help, God's daily providence, God's daily presence. That is the most important ingredient. It is basically an experience of God's active involvement in everything we do. That must be our prevailing attitude. I find that I must continually battle to keep that attitude from slipping away—for example I may wake up in the morning and immediately start to think negatively. Personally I have taken a more decisive step of faith, just recently, resolving to start each morning positively expecting God to be leading and directing before I even take under consideration any mistake or problem.

NW: *What can people expect to be the result if they do the kind of things you have talked about in this interview?*

LC: I believe the basic result will be a sense of the Lord's presence, and a sense of the Lord's approval.

al. I don't doubt that I am accepted in Christ. But I want to know that I am *pleasing* God, not simply being accepted by Him, because I know that He accepts many people that He is not pleased with. I want to know that I am pleasing to God. One fruit of a faithful walk with God is that He lets us know, "You delight me."

Here is an illustration of the distinction I'm trying to make. A parent may weep over a child that has gone astray, and there will be tremendous love in those tears. But the parent cannot honestly say that he is delighted in the way the child is going. He is concerned and loves and accepts the child but what he feels is much different from the delight a parent feels when a child goes in the right way.

I believe that one result we can expect as we stay close to God is a sense that He is delighted and pleased with us. That doesn't mean He won't still correct us and point out areas where we need to change. But basically, if our walk before the Lord is right, the result will be an awareness that God is pleased with us, that we are not a source of grief to Him.

That basic desire to please God gets us off the "glory road" where all we are looking for is what benefits *us*. Instead, we are looking for a walk of faithfulness, and even if that involves leanness, hardship or suffering, as long as we know we are pleasing to Him, that is all that really matters. ♥

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Living by a Power Beyond Our Own



by Don Basham

Years ago when I was a new and zealous Christian in Bible college, recently baptized in the Holy Spirit, I had a sociology professor—a Ph.D. graduate from Yale who had been a Navy chaplain in World War II. A brilliant man, he had written a best-selling book in his field and was well versed in his subject. But I discovered in his class through certain things he said that he was a skeptic about much that meant a great deal to me—for example, answers to prayer. His cynical comments prompted me to go up to him after class one day and say, “Professor, I take it from what you are saying that you don’t believe God answers prayer today.” He looked me right in the eye and said, “You’re absolutely right—I don’t.” I asked, “Why don’t you believe it? It’s in the Scriptures, and you’re a Christian—you’re even an ordained minister.” He replied, “I don’t

believe it for a very simple reason: I have never in all my life seen anything in anyone’s life that would indicate to me that God answers prayer.”

I was shocked by his words, and probably most of us would be as well. Many of us have become a part of the charismatic movement—we have entered into supernatural things and experienced them. But there are still millions of Christians in the Body of Christ whose testimony is the same as that man’s. Many who know that they have been born again and have committed their lives to Christ also embrace the theology that professor embraced, believing that the age of miracles has passed. But to claim to be a Christian, to have experienced forgiveness in our hearts and to have some assurance of heaven, without participating in any of the supernatural life that Christ offers, is to live an unbalanced and inadequate Christian life. The Christian life

is meant to be a balance between the natural and the supernatural.

Natural and Supernatural

Jesus was a man, yet He was more than a man. In His incarnation, He was one who was totally man and totally God, totally natural and totally supernatural. As He taught and served and gave His life, His ministry was a continual combination of both. As a man, He would grow tired and weary, and yet as a man He received the supernatural strength and power of God. In Jesus was uniquely manifested all the very best of the natural and all the very best of the supernatural—and I believe that God is calling us to be the same way.

God often moves us from one emphasis to another. He will turn a spotlight on a particular area, or quicken a certain portion of biblical truth to help us experience it and make it a part

of our lives. Then He moves on to emphasize something else.

Those of us who have come through the charismatic renewal realize that for years we were in an emphasis on the supernatural: the power of God and the gifts of the Spirit and what we could receive from God through prayer. Then God began to move us into an understanding of the need to become related properly to one another: our responsibility to our brothers and sisters, what it means to be in "covenant," what it means to be part of a committed fellowship, what it means to be under spiritual authority. We have been wrestling with how to structure the Kingdom of God on earth through committed relationships. That is a valid emphasis—in fact it is basic, for we have come to understand that some things we need to receive from God come through one another. Yet often, when God is emphasizing one truth and we get involved in it, we tend to neglect other truths that are just as important. For example, when we were primarily concerned with being baptised in the Spirit, we neglected many other aspects of the Christian life. Our critics said that charismatics were not concerned about character or maturity—and some of their criticism was justified. But when the emphasis began on relationships, we tended then to de-emphasize the supernatural, and unfortunately we have neglected that area to our detriment.

A covenant relationship will not work without the supernatural involvement of God's Holy Spirit. Unless relationships are somehow quickened by the supernatural grace of God, they become hard and legalistic. What I am saying is this: We need to take the offensive in regaining a focus on the life of prayer and faith, believing God to do things for us that we ourselves cannot do. Our faith needs to be redefined to include again the supernatural realm.

We need to recover a sense of

daily dependence on God and to establish a keen expectancy of His presence and miracle-working power.

A Different Kind of Miracle

In Matthew 14:22-33 we find the familiar passage recording the miracle of Jesus and Peter walking on the water. This is not a popular text for sermons. I think one reason why most people don't talk about this miracle is that it is so different from the others Jesus performed. We have taught and understood that the miracles in the Bible are the evidence of God's compassion and His desire to meet people's needs. Miracles of healing meet a human need. Other miracles of provision, such as the feeding of the five thousand, met human needs. Even Jesus' turning the water into wine served to save the hosts of the wedding feast from embarrassment and to prevent an interruption of the celebration.

But what about the miracle in this story—walking on water? How does it serve to meet a human need? It looks and sounds more like a magician's trick. How do we fit this miracle into the purpose of God? I want to suggest that God has a specific reason for this unusual miracle, and we will see it as we examine the biblical evidence of our need to utilize God's supernatural power to live a victorious Christian life.

Recognizing God in the Storm

To understand this more fully we must look closely at the story. In a journey through Galilee, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him by boat. Matthew writes:

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary [or the wind was against them].

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw

him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear (vv. 22-26).

It was a stormy night, and the disciples were having trouble enough with the weather when suddenly there appeared a ghostly figure approaching the boat, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Him, they said, "It is a spirit," and they cried out for fear.

First, it is important to note that Peter and the others cried out because they didn't recognize who was coming. They thought there was a problem, but there wasn't really a problem. The only problem was that they didn't recognize the form in which God

We need to recover a daily dependence on God and to establish a keen expectancy of His presence and miracle-working power.

was approaching.

That truth has great significance for us. One reason we become frightened in our own Christian lives is that we often fail to recognize the form in which God is going to manifest Himself to us. Things that at first seem threatening or frightening seem so only because we fail to recognize that God is somehow in them.

Our whole approach to life can change when we come to understand that there is something of God in everything that comes our way. God does not will evil upon us, but He often allows threatening situations to develop in order to reveal Himself and His will to us.

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Paul says this clearly in a familiar passage, Romans 8:28: "We know that in everything, God works to bring good for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose." This is such a basic principle that we probably need to frame it and hang it on the wall where we can see it daily. We must learn to embrace the difficult,

the threatening, and the challenging situations in faith and affirm that God is in them somewhere. We must respond positively to the things that come our way—both good and bad.

"Lord, Is It You?"

Returning to the story, we read how Jesus identified Himself, and how Peter responded:

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

And he said, Come (vv. 27-29).

That is a revealing statement: "Lord, if it's you, bid me come." What Peter said illustrates an important principle: before we initiate action in a particular direction in our lives, we need to check both our motivation and the source of our inspiration. Too often we act impulsively, being quick to say, "I feel God wants me to do this" or "God told me to do that." Peter's words, "Bid me come to you on the water," were rather audacious. But he conditioned them by saying first, "Lord, I want to know if that is really you out there." Peter was looking for confirmation. If he was going to move by faith in some new adventure, he wanted assurance first of all that he was hearing from God.

This is perhaps one of the most difficult areas of the Christian life. When we are faced with a decision, or a step of faith, it is not easy to know whether we are being goaded by the devil or led by the Lord. But we are right to believe that God can give us confirmation. We must remember, however, that even confirmation cannot make us absolutely certain. Though Peter received a positive answer to his question, he still had to act in faith.

We must exercise faith without making it presumption. Presumption has brought many

Christians into a great deal of trouble. When we remember some of the tragic things that have been done by people who said, "God told me to do it," we can understand the problem with presumption. On the other hand, we can't sit around waiting to become absolutely certain, because if we could be absolutely sure, we wouldn't need faith! So God very wisely requires us to walk in faith while avoiding presumption.

In response to his request for confirmation, Peter was given assurance from the Lord. When Peter said, "Lord, if that's you, bid me come to you on the water," the Lord said, "Come." So Peter had his confirmation that it was truly God who was speaking to him. Confirmation is one of the major roles a good pastor fulfills for his people. The pastor's function is not to take the place of God, or to speak in place of God, but rather to help his people find confirmation in God. When a Christian is seeking the will of God in his life, the pastor can help confirm to him that he is moving in the right direction—or to caution him if the direction seems wrong. The pastor will not necessarily be the only source of confirmation, but he does serve as God's delegated authority to help give confirmation or encouragement.

A Power Beyond Our Own

The Lord said to Peter, "Come." In some ways I think that is the most significant word in the entire New Testament, because when Peter cried out, "Lord, if that's you, bid me come to you on the water," he was speaking out of a deep need in his life. That deep desire in his heart was to do what is impossible for man and only possible by God's power. He wanted to walk by a power far beyond his own.

I cannot help but admire Peter for this deep heart's desire, and I believe that all of us have that desire in our hearts. God has put deep within all of us the realization that we cannot make it through life without His help.

Did You Know?

Many letters in the large volume of mail we receive daily contain prayer requests from our readers. The following letter is a recent example of one such request:

My husband deserted me and my children. I am fifty years old and only receive \$40.00 a week from welfare. Please pray for us. We also lost our home and I have to find another place to live before December. Pray that I will be victorious throughout all of this.

In the normal course of handling and answering **New Wine's** mail, our staff lifts up situations like this in prayer as a regular part of their work responsibility. First, whoever in our mailroom initially receives and processes letters such as this one makes intercession for the need. Then the letter is passed on to the editorial department where the staff member who responds to the letter also prays for the writer. Just before our response is sent, the need is prayed for again as the letter is signed. Finally, the request is brought up for intercession when the entire **New Wine** staff meets together for prayer.

In this way, from the time a prayer request comes into our office to the time our response is sent out, the need has been prayed for a number of times.

While there is no real substitute for the prayer support of your family, friends, and local pastor, we consider it a privilege to be available to offer up additional prayer on behalf of our readers who send us specific prayer requests. We thought you'd like to know.

By His "help," I mean not just His example, but also His supernatural strength and grace—and grace by definition is God's unmerited favor or assistance. He never intended for us to try to make it on our own—and if you don't believe that is the case, just look at this crazy world we live in now and see what is happening, because most of the world is trying to make it on its own without God.

So now we can understand how this miracle was not a cheap magician's trick after all, but—like the other miracles—an answer to human need. When Peter asked, "Lord, bid me come to you on the water," he expressed what is perhaps the deepest human need of all. Beyond healing, beyond material provision, beyond miracles and other gifts, he asked simply for the privilege of living on a level where he could do as a man what it takes supernatural power to do.

The answer Jesus gives to Peter—"Come"—is powerfully significant! It seems as an exclamation point punctuating every other scriptural promise about the power of prayer. In all the instructions Jesus gave His disciples, He never once had to caution them against being too bold in their faith. We never once hear Him say, "Now fellows, don't ask too much; tone your requests down. After all, you must be reasonable—don't become fanatics. Don't expect too much from God." On the contrary, Jesus was always trying to encourage His disciples to ask for more, to trust God more, to believe that God wanted to do more than they were willing or able even to ask or think.

God's will and intention for us is to experience and live by a power beyond our own. God never intended the Church to be without His miracle-working power. Every other kind of Christian experience is subnormal. A friend of mine used to say that the spiritual temperature in the average church is so low that when a healthy man comes along, everyone thinks he has a

fever. Normal Christianity is miracle-working Christianity.

Stepping Out of the Boat

We read next that Peter obeyed Jesus' command to step out in faith and walk:

And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (vv. 29-31)

We must notice first that even after Jesus said "Come," it was still up to Peter to respond. For Peter to participate in this miracle, he had to start by acting in the natural realm. Miracles usually don't come to people who are sitting around on their back porches with hands folded, waiting for things to happen; miracles come when we are moving in faith. Peter had to give feet to his faith. If he was to believe that the Lord really wanted him to walk on the water, he couldn't just fold his arms and sit in the boat, saying, "Okay, Lord, if you really want me to do this, float me out across the waves and we'll show the world a miracle." Peter was required to release God's supernatural power by getting out of the boat and walking.

Getting out of the boat and walking was a perfectly natural act—there was nothing supernatural in that. Peter stepped out of the boat, and began walking just as he would have if the boat had been pulled up on shore. But it took faith to do it on the sea, and when he did his part, God did His.

God wants us to realize that the supernatural works *within* the natural. There are many other examples of this principle, such as the laying on of hands

with prayer. Miracles can happen by prayer alone, but the Bible calls for laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and laying on of hands for the prayer of faith to heal the sick. Anointing with oil is another example. There is no inherent virtue in oil, just as there is no magic in the hands. These are natural acts, however, that demonstrate natural concern and compassion and are used by God to vault us into the supernatural. Without a willingness to start out moving in the natural, we may never receive the supernatural.

So Peter responded first in the natural—he stepped out of the boat. Do you suppose the water looked any firmer to him after the Lord said, "Come?" Or do you suppose that if Peter had grabbed one side of the boat, reached over with one foot and tapped the water, that it would have felt solid? No—it would have splashed just like ordinary water. There was only one way he could find out if the water would hold him up—and that was to get out with *both* feet and let go of the boat. The miracle was not that Peter walked—he did that every day on solid ground. The miracle was that he

Just Around the Corner

**Emmanuel:
"God With Us"**

Now as then, the Spirit of God prepares the way for the King.

didn't sink. God met Peter, and with every step that Peter took in faith, God was there to hold him on top of the water.

"Lord, Save Me!"

But then a rather significant thing happened to Peter as he walked on the water. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me." What happened to Peter happens to all of us when we try to live a combination of the natural and the supernatural: he was tested.

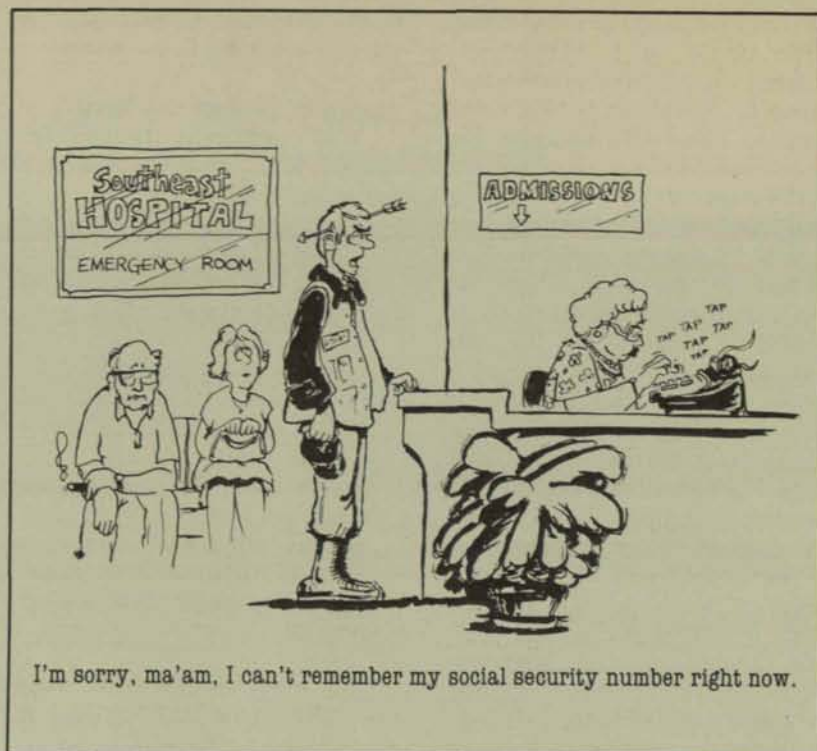
Peter got out of the boat in faith and was moving toward the Lord. Everything was going well, and he was in the midst of a miracle—and then he was tested. Such tests are common to all of us. They are a part of God's purpose. He will test everything that happens to us—good things as well as bad. Every time we take a step of faith, some kind of test will come our way; it is a spiritual principle. The test in Peter's case happened when he took his eyes off his Source. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he was all right. When he saw the waves—when he took his eyes off the Lord and was distracted by circumstances—he suddenly realized how impossible it was to do what he was doing.

Peter began to look at the situation only from a natural perspective, and no longer from God's perspective. He stopped

The Lord's arm is always long enough, and the Lord is always close enough to save us.

walking in the Spirit and began to try to walk in the flesh—and began to sink. The unbelief rose up in him in the midst of his faith and interrupted his faith.

We need to bear in mind that Peter's unbelief did not affect his natural ability—only his supernatural ability. Peter was faced with a choice: he could either



forget about the miracle and turn and swim back to the boat, or he could try to regain the miracle. Fortunately for us and for him, I think, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" But isn't it interesting that Jesus watched him begin to sink, yet didn't make a move until Peter asked for help?

Another point to remember in our own walk of faith is that God wants us to move in the supernatural realm, but there are many times when we need His extra help, and the only way we will get it is to cry out for it. In the moment Peter cried out, "Lord, save me," Jesus reached down, the Scriptures say, and caught him "immediately." The Lord's arm is always long enough, and the Lord is always close enough to save us. But time and time again He will wait until we cry out for help. Many things we never receive, even though God wants us to have them, simply because we don't ask. James said, "You receive not because you ask not." There are other reasons we don't receive help, but this is a primary one.

Unfortunately, however, people who step out in faith often fail the test. They start out in the

Spirit and end up in the flesh. They end up swimming instead of walking because when they were tested, they thought, "God's not going to see me through." So they turned back to their own strength and resources. There is nothing wrong with swimming—except when God wants you walking on the water.

God's Response to Our Failure

It is important for us to notice Jesus' response to Peter. Jesus did not say, "Peter, how stupid! Did you really think that you could do what I'm doing? Don't you know I'm the Son of God?" Instead, Jesus' only words to him were words of gentle rebuke: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" Not only does the Lord give us the encouragement to get out and walk supernaturally, but when we do falter, He is there to help us and encourage us to go on believing, even when it is hard to do it. His corrective word was not an attempt to tone down Peter's faith, but to encourage him to go on believing what he originally believed.

Often in recent years God has had to encourage me that way. He has had to remind me to go on with what I started. Sometimes that is hard to do when I am in a dry place, and the miracles are not there, and the heavens seem like brass. At those times it seems that God is not going to see me the rest of the way through. But God allows those times to come to mature us.

Adventures of Faith

Finally, Peter and Jesus returned to the boat.

And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God (vv. 32-33).

Peter had been part of a miracle,

even though he had faltered in the middle of it. Yet a miracle by the skin of your teeth is better than no miracle at all! Although Peter almost sank, in the end he was saved by the Lord, and together they went back arm and arm into the boat. As soon as they stepped into the boat, the wind ceased and the storm was over.

But what about those disciples who stayed in the boat? Why did they miss out on the experience? Is God prejudiced? Does God show favor? Of course not. But Peter was the only one who had asked for such an experience, the only one who was bold enough, or bull-headed enough, or childlike enough to give expression to his deep desire. The storm ceased, so even the others in the boat benefited from the experience. Scripture says that they all marvelled and worshipped Jesus. They had a won-

derful spiritual experience in seeing what had happened. But what happened to them was not nearly as wonderful as what happened to Peter. They watched it from afar, and they were blessed when Jesus got into the boat. They could worship and say, "Lord, we see a mighty demonstration of your power." But Peter had the truly marvelous ex-

A miracle by the skin of your teeth is better than no miracle at all!

perience. Peter had not only seen the power of God—he had lived it.

I have the feeling that all through the years of Peter's life, there were times when that memory was a great strength to him. He might have faltered and

(continued on page 27)

Foundations for the Future by Ralph Martin

In Brief

There are four basic elements presented in the New Testament which illustrate the normal Christian life:

1. *Each Christian should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.* God has established in Jesus Christ the way of being reconciled to Him, a way of removing our confusion, a way of getting free of bondage to the evil one, a way of rising with Jesus from the dead and living forever. There is no other way.
2. *The normal Christian life is life in the Holy Spirit.* It's impossible to live a normal Christian life without all the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given to the people of God for the proclamation of His gospel, to be His witnesses, and to give us the power to live Christian morality.
3. *The normal Christian life is life together.* You need to find people who are going to encourage you to love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength, and not think you are fanatical for trying to give your whole life to God.
4. *The normal Christian life is fruitful.* The love of God in our hearts and in our relationships overflows into works of mercy and charity. We are able to share the relationship with the Lord that means life or death to people with whom we have contact.

Condensed from "Foundations for the Future" by Ralph Martin—January 1980, New Wine Magazine.

Homecoming

a testimony by Paul Thigpen



“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Mal. 4:6 NIV).

With this promise and warning, the Old Testament closes. Malachi offers hope to a society whose fabric of family relationships is unraveling. But with sobering finality, he prophesies disaster for those who reject the offer.

The curse of broken father-child relationships goes far beyond the immediate bitterness and grief surrounding them. In our own day, some of the most notoriously destructive political figures—Hitler and Stalin, to name just two—grew up lacking a healthy relationship with their fathers, and consequently they

cultivated bitterness and rebellion all their lives.

But in His mercy, God offers to break this curse and turn the hearts of the fathers and children to each other. Beyond the last page of Malachi, we read next of One who came to reveal His Father, and so make obedient sons and daughters of us all. One of the clearest signs that the gospel is at work in our lives is the restoration of right relationships, especially within the family. God's dealings in this area of my own life are not only a testimony to His faithfulness, but also an indication of how precious in His sight is the restoration of a son to his father.

Resentment and Rebellion

The barriers in my relationship with my dad had their foundations in the years long before I was born. Dad's own father had been violent and often irresponsible, so that Dad had to work as a child to help support his mother and four brothers and sisters. From his

own father Dad had learned to be cold, aloof and distant from his children—he had no other men to provide him with better role models. Perhaps my grandfather's situation had been the same. In any case, my father was a diligent, honest, faithful man, but he had never learned how to express love to his children in ways they could understand. He spent little time with us, rarely listened to us, and was almost never verbally and physically affectionate. He worked hard to support us, but children rarely regard work as an expression of love until they grow up and become providers themselves.

As a child I feared Dad in all the wrong ways, convinced that I did not merit his attention or his approval. My resentment and rebellion against him were violent but mostly internal, devastating my own personality in a hundred ways. Bitterness led to arrogance; I rejected the idea of God as a heavenly father, became an atheist, and sought to take my destiny into my own

hands. By the time I prepared to enter college with plans for a political science major, the stage had been set for yet another twisted man to enter politics, craving fame and power because his father left him feeling rejected and impotent.

In His astounding mercy, God prevented "the sins of the father" from being visited again upon the child. By a series of personal crises, I was shocked out of my atheist, humanist deceptions and born into the Kingdom of God. My whole world was turned upside down. After one semester in college, the implications of the gospel sobered me into a reassessment of my priorities and I dropped out of school. Anxious to serve the Lord and get some distance between myself and my past, I went to Europe to work with the Teen Challenge ministry. My parents were enraged and hurt. They could not understand what I was doing, and I could not find the words to explain it to them. The last strained fiber of our relationship was broken.

Repentance and Reconciliation

Although my move to Germany was probably intended in part as an act of rebellion against my father, God used it for great good. Several steps were necessary for me to take on the road back to a restored relationship with Dad, including deliverance from demonic spirits that had found their entrance into my life through my hatred of him. But the most crucial step came when I heard teaching in Germany about forgiveness and submission to proper authority. A powerful conviction began to grip me: *my sin* was as much to blame as Dad's for our broken relationship. I was in grave need of repentance for my rebellion and my bitterness. The choice soon became clear: I had to get right with my father or else seal off the only road to wholeness and maturity for both of us.

I will never forget one terrifying, agonizing night as I lay alone in my room in Germany.

God gave me a vision of the bondage Dad was in because I had refused to forgive him. It was my bondage as well. I began to weep, and for literally hours I cried out to God to forgive us both, and I shouted, "Daddy, I forgive you! Please forgive me!"

I knew then that what I had said alone in my room needed to be said to Dad face-to-face. At Christmas of that year (eight months after I had left home), I returned to the States, filled both with fear and conviction. I set my face to ask my father's forgiveness, and to submit to his authority.

God, of course, was faithful. The night I opened my heart to talk, Dad broke, for he saw for the first time the hidden brokenness of his son. We were reconciled, and though I told him I would do whatever he instructed, he did not insist that I stay at home, but instead put his blessing on my work in Germany. The next summer I came home and we began to work out our relationship in earnest.

Restoration and Rebirth

Our encounter at Christmas had naturally been only a beginning. In the following months we had to labor at learning to love and respect (and enjoy) each other. Fortunately, the struggle cost both of us much of our pride and stubbornness. Most importantly, we helped shape each other's faith: he gave my faith the fiber of practicality; I pushed his faith beyond the encumbering limits his background had imposed on it.

I was a witness to miracles in those days: Dad, Mom and my younger brother and sister were baptized; Dad became a deacon and respected leader in a new church home. During these months my father began saying frequently to all of us the words I had longed as a child to hear him say: "I love you." He learned that it was not unmanly to embrace his sons and friends, to weep in front of others when God touched him, to kneel like a child to pray. He and I became free to speak our minds honestly

without threatening each other. We became able to enjoy God's small gifts together, like a summer thunderstorm or a sunrise or a bursting rose. We shared openly about the things of God.

The following January I returned to college for a degree—not in political science, but in religious studies. Two years later I graduated and began my first permanent, full-time job back in our hometown. When I wanted to strike out on my own financially to learn to handle independent living expenses and a budget, Dad and I talked it over. He assured me of his confidence that the time was right and I was ready for such a move. I knew a tremendous freedom as I left home this time, because I left with Dad's full blessing. He told me that I would always be welcome to live at home again if I had the need or desire. After I moved, we continued to be close friends; when I married a year and a half later, there was no doubt that he should be my best man in the wedding. Soon after, my wife and I moved to another state.

Crisis and Blessing

Eight months later, Dad called us to say that he had been to a doctor—and a tumor was found in his right lung. It was inoperable. My wife and I went home immediately to help in the family business and in the household while he was in the hospital. We could only stay a week on that trip, but it was a significant time for us as we examined family needs and concerns in light of the trial we faced.

During that week, I was re-



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minded that when the patriarchs of Israel approached the end of their days on earth, they called their sons to them, laid hands on them, and blessed them. God spoke prophetically through these blessings and used them as a vessel for the heritage that passed from father to son.

Since my father and I were the spiritual sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, an earnest desire was born in me to receive the patriarchal blessing from



Dad. Before we returned to our home, I knelt by his bed and he laid his hands on my head. The Spirit of God came upon Dad as he prayed. The most beautiful prayer I had ever heard flowed from his lips, and we were both reduced to tears. Of all the things he prophesied in that blessing, I remember this the most clearly: "May your ministry flow out to all the ends of the earth; and may you reach up and touch the face of God."

We returned to be with Dad several times each month in the time following. He was undergoing chemotherapy, and though the treatments affected his mind and his emotions, his faith remained strong. Dad believed in God's healing power, and often we prayed for his healing together—but he never presumed to tell God what He must do. Meanwhile, we talked openly about life, and death, and the

life beyond death. His trust in God never faltered.

A Precious Reward

By January of 1981 Dad was bedridden and losing his mental coherence. Often when I would get home in the evenings from the family business, I would spend time with him in silence, savoring what I knew would be my last days with him. The children in my family had often sung for Dad, so one evening during this period I asked him if he wanted me to sing to him. He could not speak an answer, but he began to weep. With that encouragement, I began through my own tears to sing all the old hymns I knew were his favorites, until at last he fell asleep. Even now the memory of that night is vivid and comforting, and I believe it will always be with me.

Several days later, my wife and I had to go back to complete the sale of our home. We went into his darkened room to kiss him good-bye and tell him we would return soon. He began to weep, and he struggled to utter two coherent sentences: "You'll never know how much I love you both. You've done everything for me." That was the last meaningful communication I ever had with my father, words which I will always treasure as one of the most precious rewards of my life.

When we returned four days later, Mom said Dad had begun to experience a great deal of pain. My wife learned to give him shots to relieve it, and with my mother we gave him injections every three hours around the clock. Though the despair of extreme fatigue and the ugliness of death began to taunt us during these days as his body wore out, we were sustained by a recognition of the inexpressably high honor that was ours: we were giving comfort to my father in his last days on earth, and helping him prepare to meet the Lord.

Triumph and Fulfillment

A week later, I held my

mother in my arms as we watched my father die. It was the most awesome, most holy moment of my life: a man of God was casting off his mortality and hastening to the bosom of his Maker to be clothed with glorious immortality. Through our uncontrollable weeping, I could only repeat to my mother again and again, "He's going home; he's going home." Before his last breath, I took his hand and whispered back to him one last time the words that had become his delight: "I love you." And then my father was free at last.

His funeral was a triumphant celebration of a life that had been reborn, and will be born again and again as he goes from glory to glory in the presence of God. For me the service was a reminder as well of yet another victory—for in turning my heart back to my father, and his heart back to me, the Lord had also given me a new birth into wholeness and a heritage.

Two months later I came to work for *New Wine*. In a short time my dad's prophetic blessing has found its initial fulfillment: every sentence I edit, every phrase I write, "flows out to all the ends of the earth" on the pages of this magazine. And of this one thing I am certain: with Dad joining the crowd of witnesses urging me on, I have set my heart to see the fulfillment of the rest of his prayer—that I might press on until I can reach up and touch the face of God.

Much more could be written about the specific battles, the defeats and victories, my father and I experienced as we struggled to establish a right relationship. Yet it is enough to say that the Lord took a seemingly hopeless situation and in it kept His promise to turn the heart of a father to his son, and the heart of a son to his father. I will always be grateful to God for breaking the curse of which Malachi spoke, and grateful to the wise teachers who years ago showed me my rebellion and my brokenness—and pointed the way to obedience and restoration. ♥

Instruction in the fundamentals of the faith is an important part of our Christian heritage. This month "The Word" begins a new format which will provide over the course of the next year a systematic, seasonal study of basic teachings about the creation and fall of man, the person and work of Christ, and the nature and destiny of the Church. We en-

courage our readers to use this feature daily, both for personal scripture study and family reading. Scriptures for this month are from the book of Acts and deal with the universal calling of the Church as expressed in its commission, birth, and growth outward "to the ends of the earth."

THE WORD

The Growth of the Church

- I. The Birth of the Church
 - A. The commission of Jesus. Acts 1:1-14. Nov. 1
 - B. The day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-13. Nov. 2
 - C. A miracle and its consequences. Acts 3:1-26. Nov. 3
 - D. Persecution and prayer of the saints. Acts 4:1-31. Nov. 4
 - E. Growing church's righteous standard. Acts 5:1-16. Nov. 5
 - F. "Jerusalem is filled with your teaching" Acts 5:17-32. Nov. 6
 - G. Gamaliel: "If human, it will fail" Acts 5:33-41. Nov. 7
- II. Persecution Leads to Expansion
 - A. Stephen. Acts 6 & 7. Nov. 8
 - B. Philip. Acts 8. Nov. 9
 - C. Paul's Conversion. Acts 9:1-31. Nov. 10
- III. Peter and the Beginning of Gentile Christianity
 - A. Peter in western Palestine. Acts 9:32-43. Nov. 11
 - B. Peter and Cornelius. Acts 10:1-48. Nov. 12
 - C. Explanation of gentile conversion. Acts 11:1-18. Nov. 13
 - D. The church in Antioch. Acts 11:19-30. Nov. 14
 - E. Herod and the Church. Acts 12:1-25. Nov. 15
- IV. Paul's First Missionary Journey
 - A. Barnabas and Saul to Cyprus. Acts 13:1-12. Nov. 16
 - B. Pisidian Antioch. Acts 13:13-25. Nov. 17
 - C. Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Acts 14:1-28. Nov. 18
 - D. The council at Jerusalem. Acts 15:1-29. Nov. 19
- V. Paul's Later Journeys
 - A. Philippi. Acts 16:6-40. Nov. 20
 - B. Thessalonica to Athens. Acts 17:1-34. Nov. 21
 - C. Corinth. Acts 18:1-17. Nov. 22
 - D. Ephesus. Acts 18:18-28; 19:1-20. Nov. 23
- VI. Paul Plans to Go to Rome
 - A. Leaves Ephesus for Macedonia and Greece. Acts 19:21-41; 20:1-6. Nov. 24
 - B. Jerusalem journey and confrontation. Acts 20:7-23:30. Nov. 25
 - C. Paul at Caesarea. Acts 23:31-25:11. Nov. 26
 - D. Paul before Agrippa. Acts 25:12-26:32. Nov. 27
 - E. Journey and shipwreck. Acts 27:1-44. Nov. 28
 - F. In Malta. Acts 28:1-10. Nov. 29
 - G. Rome at last. Acts 28:11-31. Nov. 30

My Heart— Christ's Home

by Robert Boyd Munger



In Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, we find these words: "That [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:16). Or, as another has translated, "That Christ may settle down and be at home in your hearts by faith."

Without question one of the most remarkable Christian doctrines is that Jesus Christ himself through the presence of the Holy Spirit will actually enter a heart, settle down and be at home there. Christ will make the human heart his abode.

Our Lord said to his disci-

ples, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23). It was difficult for them to understand what he was saying. How was it possible for him to make his abode with them in this sense?

It is interesting that our Lord used the same word here that he

gave them in the first of the fourteenth chapter of John: "I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, ye may be also." Our Lord was promising his disciples that, just as he was going to heaven to prepare a place for them and would welcome them one day, now it would be possible for them to prepare a place for him in their

hearts and he would come and make his abode with them.

They could not understand this. How could it be?

Then came Pentecost. The Spirit of the living Christ was given to the church and they understood. God did not dwell in Herod's temple in Jerusalem! God did not dwell in a temple made with hands; but now, through the miracle of the out-poured Spirit, God would dwell in human hearts. The body of the believer would be the temple of the living God and the human heart would be the home of Jesus Christ. It is difficult for me to think of a higher privilege than to make for Christ a home in my heart, to welcome, to serve, to please, to fellowship with him there. One evening that I shall never forget, I invited him into my heart. What an entrance he made! It was not a spectacular emotional thing, but very real. It was at the very center of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire in the cold hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness and he filled the emptiness with his own loving, wonderful fellowship. I have never regretted opening the door to Christ and I never will—not into eternity!

This, of course, is the first step in making the heart Christ's home. He has said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). If you are interested in making your life an abode of the living God, let me encourage you to invite Christ into your heart and he will surely come.

After Christ entered my heart and in the joy of that new-found relationship, I said to him, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. I want to have you settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to you. Let me show you around and introduce you to the various features of the home that

you may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together." He was very glad to come, of course, and happier still to be given a place in the heart.

The Library

The first room was the study—the library. Let us call it the study of the mind. Now in my home this room of the mind is a very small room with very thick walls. But it is an important room. In a sense, it is the control room of the house. He entered with me and looked around at the books in the bookcase, the magazines upon the table, the pictures on the wall. As I followed his gaze I became uncomfortable. Strangely enough, I had not felt badly about this before, but now that he was there looking at these things I was embarrassed. There were some books there that his eyes were too pure to behold. There was a lot of trash and literature on the table that a Christian had no business reading and as for the pictures on the wall—the imagination and thoughts of my mind—these were shameful.

I turned to him and said, "Master, I know that this room needs a radical alteration. Will you help me make it what it ought to be—to bring every thought into captivity to you?"

"Surely!" he said. "Gladly will I help you. That is one reason I am here. First of all, take all the things that you are reading and seeing which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Now put on the empty shelves the books of the Bible. Fill the library with Scriptures and meditate on them day and night. As for the pictures on the wall, you will have difficulty controlling these images, but here is an aid." He gave me a full-sized portrait of himself. "Hang this centrally," He said, "on the wall of the mind." I did and I have discovered through the years that when my thoughts are centered upon Christ himself, his purity and power cause impure

imaginings to retreat. So he has helped me to bring my thoughts into captivity.

May I suggest to you if you have difficulty with this little room of the mind, that you bring Christ in there. Pack it full with the Word of God, meditate upon it and keep before it ever the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus.

The Dining Room

From the study we went into the dining room, the room of appetites and desires. Now this was a very large room. I spent a good deal of time in the dining room and much effort in satisfying my wants.

I said to him, "This is a very commodious room and I am quite sure you will be pleased with what we serve here."

He seated himself at the table with me and asked, "What is on the menu for dinner?"

"Well," I said, "my favorite dishes: old bones, corn husks, sour cabbage, leeks, onions, and garlic right out of Egypt." There were the things I liked—worldly fare. I suppose there was nothing radically wrong in any particular item, but it was not the food that should satisfy the life of a real Christian. When the food was placed before him, he said nothing about it. However, I observed that he did not eat it, and I said to him, somewhat disturbed, "Savior, you don't care for the food that is placed before you? What is the trouble?"

He answered, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." He looked at me again and

Robert Boyd Munger was formerly a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is currently an associate pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California.

said, "If you want food that really satisfies you, seek the will of the Father, not your own pleasures, not your own desires, not your own satisfaction. Seek to please me, and that food will satisfy you." And there about the table he gave me a taste of doing God's will. What a flavor! There is no food like it in all the world. It alone satisfies. Everything else is dissatisfying in the end.

Now if Christ is in your heart, and I trust he is, what

rather do than have a few minutes apart with Christ in intimate comradeship.

He promised, "I will be here every morning early. Meet with me here and we will start the day together." So, morning after morning, I would come downstairs to the drawing room and he would take a book of the Bible from the bookcase. He would open it and then we would read together. He would tell me of its riches and unfold to me its

when I was in a hurry, rushing down the steps, eager to be on my way.

As I passed the drawing room, the door was ajar. Looking in I saw a fire in the fireplace and the Lord was sitting there. Suddenly in dismay, I thought to myself, "He was my guest. I had invited him into my heart! He had come as Lord of my home. And yet here I am neglecting him." I turned and went in. With downcast glance I said, "Blessed Master, forgive me. Have you been here all these mornings?"

"Yes," he said, "I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you." Then I was even more ashamed. He had been faithful in spite of my faithlessness. I asked his forgiveness and he readily forgave me as he does when we are truly penitent.

He said, "The trouble with you is this: You have been thinking of the quiet time, of the Bible study and prayer time, as a factor in your own spiritual progress, but you have forgotten that this hour means something to me also. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at a great cost. I desire your fellowship. Now," he said, "do not neglect this hour if only for my sake. Whatever else may be your desire, remember I want your fellowship!"

You know, the truth that Christ wants my fellowship, that he loves me, wants me to be with him, wants to be with me and waits for me, has done more to transform my quiet time with God than any other single fact. Don't let Christ wait alone in the drawing room of your heart, but every day find some time when, with the Word of God and in prayer, you may fellowship with him.

The Workshop

Before long he asked, "Do you have a workshop in your home?" Down in the basement of the home of my heart I had a workbench and some equipment, but I was not doing much



kind of food are you serving him and what kind of food are you eating yourself? Are you living for the lust of the flesh and the pride of life—selfishly? Or are you choosing God's will for your meat and drink?

The Drawing Room

We walked next into the drawing room. This room was rather intimate and comfortable. I liked it. It had a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a bookcase, sofa and a quiet atmosphere.

He also seemed pleased with it. He said, "This is indeed a delightful room. Let us come here often. It is secluded and quiet and we can have fellowship together."

Well, naturally, as a young Christian I was thrilled. I could not think of anything I would

truths. He would make my heart warm as he revealed his love and his grace toward me. They were wonderful hours together. In fact, we called the drawing room the "withdrawing room." It was a period when we had our quiet time together.

But little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, this time began to be shortened. Why, I don't know, but I thought I was just too busy to spend time with Christ. This was not intentional, you understand; it just happened that way. Finally, not only was the time shortened, but I began to miss a day now and then. It was examination time at the university. Then it was some other urgent emergency. I would miss it two days in a row and often more.

I remember one morning

with it. Once in a while I would go down and fuss around with a few little gadgets, but I wasn't producing anything substantial or worthwhile.

I led him down there.

He looked over the workbench and what little talents and skills I had. He said, "This is quite well furnished. What are you producing with your life for the Kingdom of God?" He looked at one or two of the little toys that I had thrown together on the bench and he held one up to me. "Are these little toys all that you are producing in your Christian life?"

"Well," I said, "Lord, that is the best I can do. I know it isn't much and I really want to do more, but after all, I have no skill or strength."

"Would you like to do better?" he asked.

"Certainly," I replied.

"All right. Let me have your hands. Now relax in me and let my Spirit work through you. I know you are unskilled and clumsy and awkward, but the Spirit is the Master-worker and if he controls your hands and your heart he will work through you." And so, stepping around behind me and putting his great, strong hands over mine, controlling the tools with his skillful fingers, he began to work through me.

There's much more that I must still learn and I am very far from satisfied with the product that is being turned out, but I do know that whatever has been produced for God has been through his strong hand and through the power of his Spirit in me.

Do not become discouraged because you cannot do much for God. Your ability is not the fundamental condition. It is he who is controlling your fingers and upon whom you are relying. Give your talents and gifts to God and he will do things with them that will surprise you.

The Rumpus Room

I remember the time he inquired about the playroom. I

was hoping he would not ask me about that. There were certain associations and friendships, activities and amusements that I wanted to keep for myself. I did not think Christ would enjoy them or approve of them, so I evaded the question.

But there came an evening when I was leaving to join some companions—I was in college at the time—and as I was about to cross the threshold, he stopped me with a glance. "Are you going out?"

I answered, "Yes."

"Good," he said, "I would like to go with you."

"Oh," I replied rather awkwardly. "I don't think, Lord, that you would really want to go with us. Let's go out tomorrow night. Tomorrow night we will go to a prayer meeting, but tonight I have another appointment."

He said, "That's all right. Only I thought when I came into your home we were going to do everything together. We were going to be partners. I want you to know that I am willing to go with you."

"Well," I said, "we will go some place together tomorrow night."

But that evening I spent some miserable hours. I felt wretched. What kind of a friend was I to Christ, when I was deliberately leaving him out of my associations, doing things and going places that I knew very well he would not enjoy? When I returned that evening, there was a light in his room and I went up to talk it over with him. I said, "Lord, I have learned my lesson. I cannot have a good time without you. We will do everything together from now on."

Then we went down into the rumpus room of the house and he transformed it. He brought into life real joy, real happiness, real satisfaction, real friendship. Laughter and music have been ringing in the house ever since.

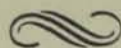
That Hall Closet

There is just one more matter that I might share with you. One

Tips for Fathers

One of Dad's jobs is to give each member a place in the family. At home I had a place at the table for meals and games. It was **my** place. Later I also learned that it was my place to bring in stove wood and still later to milk the cows. Dad showed me my place in the family. While I did not always like it, I came to realize that I had a place. I was needed and I belonged.

—Vernon Simpson



"Tips for Fathers" are excerpts from **Fathergram**. If you would like to be added to their mailing list, write: **Fathergram**, P.O. Box Z, Mobile, AL 36616.

day I found him waiting for me at the door. There was an arresting look in his eye. He said to me as I entered, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. There is something dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet." As soon as he said the words, I knew what he was talking about. Yes, there was a small hall closet up there on the landing, just a few feet square, and in that closet behind lock and key I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anybody to know about and certainly I did not want Christ to see. I knew they were dead and rotting things. And yet I loved them, and I wanted them so for myself that I was afraid to admit they were there. I went up the stairs with him and as we mounted, the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed at the door and said, "It's in there! Some dead thing!"

I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given him access to the library, the dining room, the drawing room, the workshop, the rumpus room, and now he was asking me about a

little two-by-four closet. I said inwardly, "This is too much. I am not going to give him the key."

"Well," he said, reading my thoughts, "if you think I am going to stay up here on the second floor with this odor, you are mistaken. I will take my bed out on the back porch. I'm certainly not going to put up with that." And I saw him start down the stairs.

When you have come to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense his fellowship retreating from you. I had to surrender. "I'll give you the key," I said sadly, "but you'll have to open the closet. You'll have to clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it."

"I know," he said. "I know

chance that you would take over the responsibility of the whole house and operate it for me and with me just as you did that closet? Would you take the responsibility to keep my heart what it ought to be and my life

You are going to be the Lord." Running as fast as I could to the strong box, I took out the title deed to the house describing its assets and liabilities, its situation and condition. Then returning to him, I eagerly signed it over

"You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. . . . Let me do it through you and for you."

you haven't. Just give me the key. Just authorize me to take care of that closet and I will." So, with trembling fingers I passed the key over to him. He took it from my hand, walked over to the door, opened it, entered it, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting there and threw it away. Then he cleansed the closet, painted it, fixed it up, doing it all in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!

Transferring the Title

Then a thought came to me. I said to myself, "I have been trying to keep this heart of mine clear for Christ. I start on one room and no sooner have I cleaned that then another room is dirty. I begin on the second room and the first room becomes dusty again. I am so tired and weary trying to maintain a clean heart and an obedient life. I just am not up to it!" So I ventured a question: "Lord, is there any

where it ought to be?"

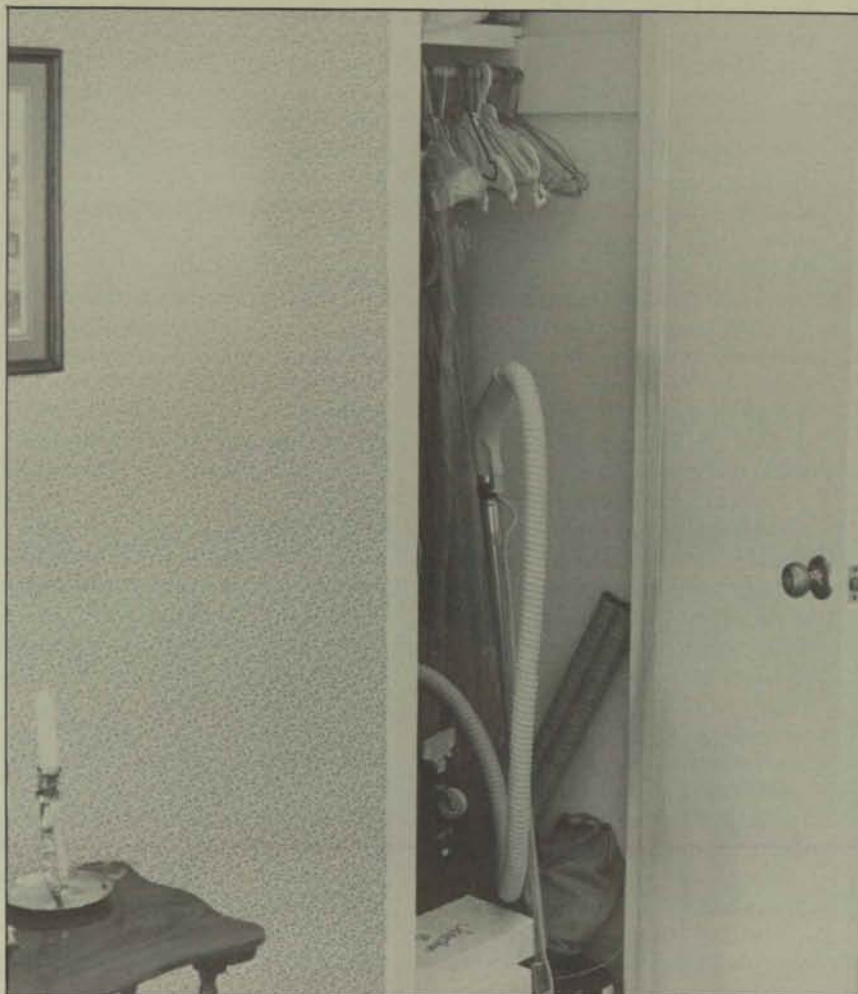
I could see his face light up as he replied, "Certainly, that is what I came to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. That is impossible. Let me do it through you and for you. That is the way. But," he added slowly, "I am not owner of this house. I am just a guest. I have no authority to proceed since the property is not mine."

I saw it in a minute and dropping to my knees, I said, "Lord, you have been a guest, and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant.

to belong to him alone for time and eternity. "Here," I said, "here it is, all that I am and have forever. Now you run the house. I'll just remain with you as houseboy and friend."

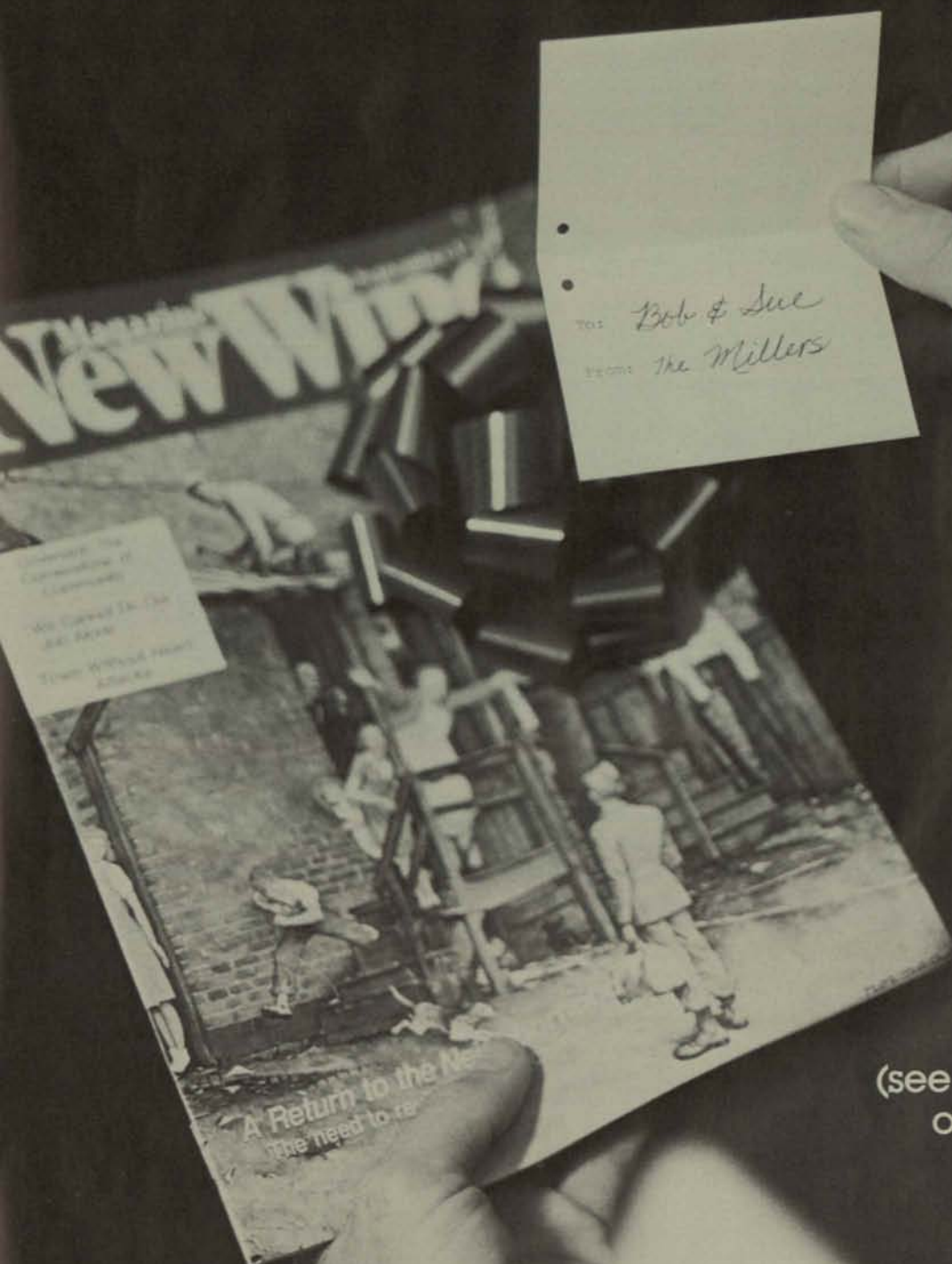
He took my life that day and I can give you my word, there is no better way to live the Christian life. He knows how to keep it in shape and deep peace settles down on the soul. May Christ settle down and be at home in your heart as Lord of all. ♥

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Why Are You Doing What You Are Doing?



by Dick Leggatt

Once a young mother was preparing a special ham supper for a family gathering which was to include all the relatives. The first job on her list was to prepare the ham for cooking. Taking the opportunity to give her young daughter some cooking tips, the mother said,

"Now, whenever you cook a ham, always slice it in half first, and then cook each half in a separate pan." Her daughter asked innocently, "Why do you cut it in half and cook it in two pans, Mommy? The pan you have is big enough to hold it." A little puzzled herself by the question, the mother replied, "I don't real-

ly know the reason for doing it this way. It's just the way my mother taught me."

Later when the little girl's grandmother arrived for the family meal, the young homemaker took her aside and asked, "Mother, is there a reason for slicing the ham and cooking it in two separate pans?" Her mother

replied, "There's probably a good reason, but I don't know it. My mother is the one who taught me to do it that way. Why don't we ask her?" So together they went into the living room, and asked "Great Grandma" the reason for cooking the ham that way. "It's simple," she answered. "I never had a pan big enough to cook a whole ham, so I always had to slice it in two to fit it in the pans I had."

Do you ever ask yourself why you are doing the things you are doing? What is the motivation behind the things we do? Lately I have realized that much of what we do in our Christian lives we do without good reason. Perhaps we talk a certain way and use certain phrases because "that's the way a Christian is supposed to sound when he talks," or simply because we have learned certain traits from those who have been influential in our lives. In terms of the minor habits and activities of our daily living it is relatively harmless and incidental if we don't know why we do what we do. However, in terms of God's ultimate purpose for our lives, there is cause for concern if we don't know why we are doing what we are doing.

In view of that concern, we need to examine regularly what we are doing and why we are doing it. The basic question is, am I doing this because it is the will of God for me to do it? If we can't answer yes, then we may be doing the wrong thing.

Is This God's Will?

Most Christians, if asked why they are doing what they do, would give a variety of responses: "It just worked out that way"; "We enjoy it"; "It 'feels' right for us"; "All the circumstances lined up to indicate that we should do this." But all those responses are inadequate compared to "I am doing this because I believe it is the will of God for me."

Recently I was talking with a couple who were struggling with doubts about their occupational,

geographical and spiritual placement. When I asked why they doubted that their present situation was right for them, they cited several legitimate problems and misgivings, adding that they just didn't "feel good" about their circumstances. Understandably, all of this taken together was making them wonder whether a change were due, so their intention was to scout around and see whether things might work out better elsewhere. But inevitably, one sobering question arose: "What if things don't work out in the next situation, either?" The bottom line of our discussion—the primary issue—was this: Is it God's will for you to be where you are, doing what you are doing? If so, regardless of discouraging circumstances, you are in the right place.

Finding and fulfilling God's will for us is a personal issue each of us must ultimately settle. Although circumstances can fill a supplementary role in guidance, confirming what we think God is saying to us, the primary issue—trusting that we are doing what we are doing because first and foremost it is God's will for us—must be settled. Otherwise, circumstances will toss us about on a sea of uncertainty, where one moment (when things are going well) we are certain we are in the center of God's will for us, and the next (when problems surround us) we are just as certain we have missed God. If the apostle Paul had relied upon this kind of "confirmation," he would have complained bitterly as he sat, hands and feet in chains, in the Philippian jail—instead of singing hymns of praise preparing the way for the jailer and all his family to be brought into the Kingdom of God.

As Christians we must position ourselves through prayer, fasting, and study of the Bible and Christian teaching in such a way that we will hear God, respond properly to His word, and put His plan for us into action in our lives. Everything we do

should be based on what we see as God's will for us. Energy expended doing things which are not in God's will is wasted energy, leading only to futile and

The danger of apparent success (or success in the eyes of men only) is that it can be misinterpreted as God's own affirmation of our activities.

fruitless activity which amounts to failure in God's sight.

The True Gauge of Success

We might be amazed if we could see which of our activities—even our "religious" activities—God disapproves of because they are performed apart from His will for us. I remember the excitement of conferences I have attended in the past which drew crowds in the thousands. At the time I felt the numbers alone undoubtedly constituted success in God's eyes. But I must ask myself in retrospect, "What was *really* accomplished in some of those meetings?" Despite their apparent "success" in terms of size, the painful truth is that often very little was accomplished.

Recently I was sobered to realize that it is possible for *New Wine Magazine* to be regarded as successful in the world's eyes but as a failure in God's eyes if it does not accomplish what He intends. True success for *New Wine* is not getting "rave reviews." Rather, it is first fulfilling the purpose of God for the publication itself, and



Dick Leggatt is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a bachelor's degree in English Literature. For the past five years he has been the Managing Editor of New Wine Magazine. Dick and his wife, Cindi, reside with their three sons in Mobile, Alabama.



secondly helping our readers come to a place where they can hear God speak to them personally, respond to His voice and take tangible steps to apply His will in their daily lives. Such success often cannot be seen or measured, but it is nonetheless the only real success, since it is success in God's eyes. The danger of apparent success (or success in the eyes of men only) is that it can be misinterpreted as God's own affirmation of our activities. Such a misinterpretation may prompt us simply to perpetuate a "successful" system which has "the form of godliness [and godly success], but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). Success, then, boils down to one basic issue: finding and following God's will, and helping others to do the same.

Basic Checklist

Because it is vital that we be moving in the center of God's will for our lives, we should regularly evaluate what we are

working to accomplish to make sure it is the right investment of our time, our energy and our very lives. Here are some basic questions we can ask ourselves in that regard:

1. *Am I doing what I am doing with my life because I believe it is God's will for me?* Or have I simply allowed circumstances to determine the course of my life?

2. *Am I in the location, job and spiritual family where I am because I know God has called me to be there?* As the saying goes, "If God has called you to be in Dallas, Texas, you can't be righteous in Trenton, New Jersey." Jonah was certainly a prime example of this principle when he refused to go to Nineveh and ended up instead in the belly of a fish.

3. *What has God primarily called me to do with my life?* What is His priority for me in terms of the gifts and abilities he has given me?

4. *Are there some things I know God has told me to do that I am unwilling or afraid to do?* Again, Jonah is a case

in point that it is better to do God's will—regardless of the implications—than to shrink back from what He has asked of us.

5. *Am I acting on God's revealed will?* Is God's will being tangibly expressed by good fruit produced in my life?

If we cannot answer these questions to our own satisfaction, it is a good indication that we need to draw closer to the Lord, earnestly asking Him to reveal His will for us. All the prosperity, "success" and pleasure we could possibly attain is no substitute for the one essential need of every Christian—the assurance that what he is doing is God's will for him.

Being a "Father-Pleaser"

In reality, the needs and concerns facing each of us are rather basic. We all want to be fulfilled and satisfied in our family life, our occupation, our relationships with others and with the Lord. Beyond those essentials, each of us needs to know that there is a reason for what he is doing, a purpose for his existence. In spiritual terms, we would call this a vision—without which, the Bible warns us, we will perish. The fulfillment of all these basic requirements by godly means amounts to success in life, a goal that all of us desire to achieve.

Such success comes as we position ourselves to perceive God's purpose for us individually, responding properly to it by working it out tangibly in our lives. As exemplified by Jesus, the deepest satisfaction for us can only come when we know that we "do always those things which please the Father"—regardless of the implications or the consequences. If we continually stay in that posture, we will have the joy and confidence that comes from knowing that we are doing what we are doing, not because it "seems good" or "feels right," but because we know it is the will of the Father. ♥

Remember: Friday, November 6, is a national day of prayer and fasting.

(Don Basham,

continued from page 13)

failed at other times, but he could always say, "I don't know much about anything else, but I'll tell you one thing: there was a time when I walked on the water." We all need that kind of testimony.

Walking through trials in our

own walk of faith teaches us to appreciate the Lord's faithfulness. We all need our own adventures of faith in God. We, too, need to believe God and step out and receive from God those things that only God can provide. Otherwise, we will never achieve the norm God intends for us: living the life which

Jesus lived—perfectly blending the natural and the supernatural. God wants us to live that kind of life, and God wants to answer our prayer, just as He answered Peter's cry, to live by a power beyond our own. ▼

No Ban on "Wine" Imports

Recently, an associate of **New Wine Magazine** was attending a Christian conference in Washington, DC. He introduced himself to a man from another country seated next to him at a meeting, and mentioned that he was originally from Mobile, Alabama. When the man heard this, he exclaimed, "Mobile? That's where **New Wine Magazine** is!" He then went on to tell how he had received **New Wine** for three years in his Communist-dominated country, and how it had strengthened him to endure its present government's pressures and persecutions, including the arrest, imprisonment and removal of some of his associates. He added that, to his knowledge, **New Wine** is the only Christian publication allowed entry into his country, and the only reason he can imagine for this is that the Communist officials believe it to be a magazine about wines.

Earlier this year, we had

received correspondence from this reader in which he told his story. We feel that the letter reprinted below would be inspiring to our readers. (We have deleted specific details to protect other readers in that same country.)

Dear Sir,

For three years I have been receiving the **New Wine Magazine**. I am indeed unable to describe in words how vital it was for me and my Christian fellows, who were sharing it with me, living under the atheist Communists' terror and brainwashing. It was not always delivered, and when placed in my postal box was done deliberately with great delay. Thank the Lord that even that was possible. Many people in the free world realize the value of freedom. However, as sick people with painful disease do appreciate more the value of health, likewise the

concrete value of freedom is esteemed by those unfortunates who come to lose it.

Thank Almighty God I escaped miraculously from the Communists' grip by walking from — to —, a...border town [in a neighboring country]. From there by the way of — and —, I have arrived here, where I'm intending to resettle permanently. How vital it is to breathe again the air of freedom. Thank you all. Please continue to send me the magazine.

Dr. Aradom Tedla
Washington, D.C.

We are grateful for such an inspiring testimony of how God is using **New Wine Magazine** to strengthen readers in other countries, particularly those who are enduring difficult circumstances.

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ANNOUNCING **BUSINESSGRAM**



The cry in the hearts of many Christian men and women today is for teaching that addresses the relationship between Christian faith and work. We want to inform our **New Wine** readers of a newsletter which will speak to that deep need.

BusinessGram is a monthly publication that will provide sound, practical business advice based upon the principles of the Kingdom of God. It will examine a wide variety of pertinent issues that affect each of us, including

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"**BusinessGram** is an idea whose time has come. For so long I have searched for a practical newsletter that integrates my faith with my calling in business."

Gregory J. Jackson, President of Century Marketing Company

"I am glad to see **BusinessGram** examine business and economic issues, because they are critical to the person who must produce, pay taxes and tithe."

Charles Simpson, Chairman of the Board of **New Wine Magazine**

To obtain a sample copy with subscription information, write:

BusinessGram
P.O. Box 21
Bowling Green, OH 43402

We at **New Wine** are pleased to see this vital ministry emerging, and we wholeheartedly recommend it to our readers, particularly men and women in the business world, to help them better fulfill God's calling for them in business.

Jesus gave a strong and direct call for personal prayer in word and example, as well as a call to communal and eucharistic prayer. All are needed for the full relationship with Him that He desires.

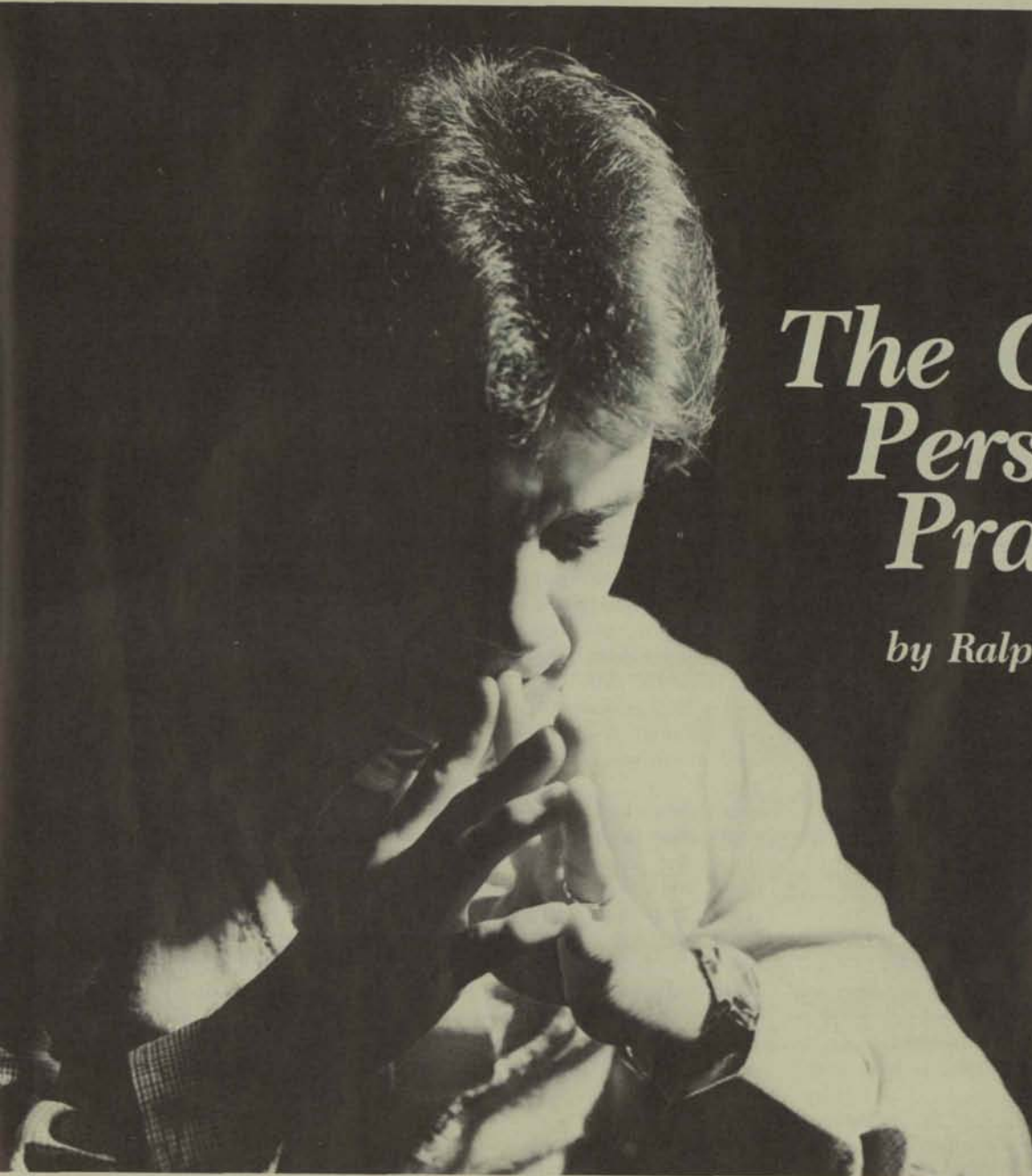
Jesus, who had the most intimate relationship with the Father possible and the most unbroken communion, except when it was willingly sacrificed as He tasted desolation and death for us, set a conspicuous example of slipping away to spend time alone with the Father, even whole nights, and directed His followers to do the same. We see also how He desires those following Him to be close to Him, to

give Him support and personal friendship.

When you pray go to your room and close the door and your Father who hears you in secret will reward you (Mt. 6:5).

Could you not watch with me one hour? (Mt. 26:40).

The decision to enter into the deeper relationship with Him



The Call to Personal Prayer

by Ralph Martin

that is being offered must involve the decision to spend time regularly, daily, in personal prayer. In order for the decision to be effective, it has to be concretized as to time and place. In fact, wisely choosing the time and place is usually a process that takes awhile to be satisfactorily concluded, and is itself half the battle.

The Right Time and Place

Finding the right time is going to take some thought and some consultation with those we live and work with. Generally, it seems best to choose a daily time for personal prayer as one of the first things in the morning. For some, however, this is not desirable or possible. For some, scheduling the prayer time into the lunch hour seems to be best; for others, some evening hour; for some, the hours must vary from day to day, but if a daily prayer time is not scheduled for each of these days, it almost certainly will not happen regularly, if at all. A real estate man I know gets up early in the morning to pray; an aerospace engineer prays and reads Scripture on his lunch hour; a production manager of a computing firm prays after the children are in bed at night.

The multiplicity of demands on our time and attention is such that if we do not put a priority on spending time alone with the Lord each day we are not likely to do it. Some have a reluctance to schedule because it seems "unspontaneous." But if we consider any other important relationship, we realize that when it becomes serious it passes from the spontaneous (and haphazard) to

the committed and scheduled. If two people want to become more than mere acquaintances, they need to agree on definite times and places to get together. If parents of a growing family want to regularly spend time together, they must schedule it, plan on it and arrange for baby-sitting. Romantic ideas about spontaneity are just that: romantic and not realistic. There is plenty of room for spontaneity within the framework of a committed relationship with regular times scheduled to be spent together. There can be extra times together, unplanned and spontaneous. There can be spontaneity within the regular times. But if there is no base of committed regular time together, there is not going to be much of a relationship. There may have been another age and time when the multiplicity of demands and sensory overload was not such as it is today (there may not have been, either!); but today if we do not make commitments and guarantee their fulfillment by scheduling time for them, we allow our life to be ruled by whoever or whatever grabs us first. That is frequently not the Lord. A schedule that works is a gift from the Lord, and an expression of His wisdom and love. Taking time to carefully work one out as regards personal prayer (as well as our other important responsibilities) can do a great deal to solidify our relationship with Him. If your first schedule does not work, do not become discouraged. It is well worth working on the right one for years, if necessary; it is that important.

Finding the right place is also important, although not usually quite as difficult as finding the right time. It should be a place where we are comfortable (not too hot or cold); a place without a lot of distractions; a place where we will not be interrupted; a place where we can sit or stand or walk or kneel, as the Spirit may lead us; a place where we can sing or dance as well as remain silent. If the ideal place does not exist, get the best you

can, and God will honor it.

As seemingly mundane as considerations of time and place are, working them out satisfactorily can solve a lot of spiritual problems.

A Simple Structure

Some feel that any question of method is irrelevant when the Holy Spirit has been released in their lives. They feel that prayer "comes naturally" and there is no need for instruction. Most people, however, even though they are experiencing a renewed or new life with God in the Holy Spirit, run into problems and questions in prayer and are not satisfied with their progress. Half the battle, but only half, is regularizing the daily time and place of prayer. Many other problems flow from ignorance of how to spend a profitable prayer time. Most people by temperament and natural ability are not capable of, or easily interested in, the rigorously constructed systems of meditation that earlier generations were raised on. With the fuller release of the Holy Spirit in people's lives, the same rigor is not always quite appropriate or even helpful.

I would like to suggest a prayer time with a simple structure that allows a great deal of variety and response to the Spirit's leadings, yet gives enough form so that one is not at a loss when times of dryness come. This kind of structure comes naturally to some, but by no means to all. Even those praying in this way spontaneously can find help in becoming conscious of what they are doing and why, both for the inevitable days of testing ahead, and to learn to share their good fortune and help others into a regular life of personal prayer.

Spiritual Reading

It is the united witness of Christians from all centuries that personal prayer should be supported by regularly reading Scripture and other books that reveal something of God and give us a desire to know and love

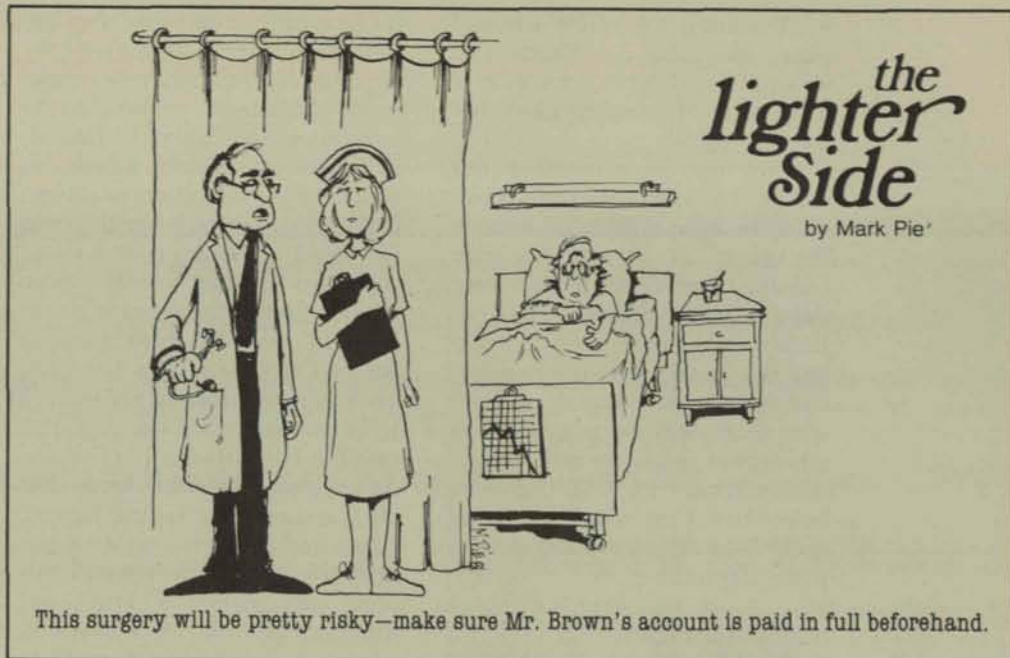


Ralph Martin is a coordinator of *The Word of God*, an ecumenical Christian community in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He also serves as a member of the International Council, which directs the work of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office in Rome. Ralph has written several books, including *Hungry for God and Husbands, Wives, Parents, Children*. He presently resides in Ann Arbor with his wife, Anne, and their four children.

Him more. Spiritual reading is not necessarily study. It does not aim at knowing for the sake of knowing, or knowing for the sake of doing something. In one sense anything can serve to draw us closer to God, and it has become fashionable to talk about the daily newspaper as our spiritual reading. The newspaper may occasionally or secondarily perform that function, but that is not its primary purpose. Prayerfully reading the Scriptures, listening for the word of the Lord, is spiritual reading. Reading the biography of a great man or woman of God, with the primary purpose of learning how to serve God better and love Him more, and being inspired to that end, is spiritual reading. Reading about collegiality in the Church or the formation of parish councils, or the scholarly attempts to sort out the diverging resurrection narratives, while helpful and important, are not spiritual reading in the sense we are using.

When people speak about their "prayer time," they are often referring to the time they spend in spiritual reading as well as in prayer. Since the two are so closely related, this is an acceptable way of speaking if we are clear about how the two work together and the distinction between the two. The danger, of course, in associating the two so closely under the title of "prayer time" is that we may spend more of the time reading and thinking than we are praying. Let us for our purposes accept the designation "prayer time" as referring to both our spiritual reading and our explicit prayer and see how they can work together.

An ancient method of prayer and spiritual reading consists in slowly and prayerfully reading a passage from Scripture, pausing again to let prayer develop from that, alternating for the whole prayer time. The regularity of the reading guards from distractions, and the freedom to move to prayer as the Spirit leads gives the necessary freedom. It is a method of working prayer and



spiritual reading together that many have found helpful and that has produced real holiness. . . .

Another way of combining spiritual reading and prayer would be to spend the first half of our prayer period in spiritual reading, and the second half in prayer, or vice versa. This would allow a fuller development of the prayer response in praise, worship, petition, silence or whatever.

If we have a prayer time of a half hour, fifteen minutes could be devoted to spiritual reading, fifteen to prayer. If we have an hour prayer time, half an hour could be devoted to reading, half to prayer. This is a good rule of thumb but it should be considered a rough guide rather than a law. Some days we may spend our whole prayer time in prayer, depending on how the Spirit is leading. Some people may regularly spend less time reading than praying. I would doubt the wisdom of spending the whole time in reading, except on very rare occasions. The danger is that spiritual reading becomes a substitute for prayer. It is imperative that whatever method we use we put the book down and turn to the Lord directly! Reading is an aid, not a substitute. . . .

I am not prepared to suggest

an order in which the different elements of prayer should occur in our prayer times—vocal praise first, then silent adoration, etc. But I would like to indicate some of the elements that should be regularly represented in our prayer, not because we decide they should be represented, but because they are things the Spirit regularly strives to do in each of us.

Praise

Frequently the Spirit strives to move us to praise. One of the outstanding characteristics of the charismatic renewal, one of the main effects of the baptism of the Spirit is that it releases in us a Spirit of praise of God. I have heard countless people testify to the way they praised God from their hearts for the first time. Prayers of praise are found throughout the Scriptures and our liturgical services, but how seldom are they prayed from the heart. Glory to God for the freedom to praise Him! It is good to praise the Lord even when we do not feel like it; feelings sometimes follow our praising from our will. Sometimes beginning to pray in tongues can free in us the Spirit of praise and worship.

Praise can be silent or vocal. Oftentimes I find it helpful to

walk around my office where I pray, clapping my hands and singing. Singing in tongues is a great way of praising God that the Spirit gives. . . .

Freedom in expressing our praise to God is important; scarcely ever will it be exactly the same as it was the day before. I would think that every day in our prayer time we should have some time of praising the Lord, whether we feel like it or not. I would suspect that there will be prayer times when that is all we will do the whole time—we will not even have time for reading. How good God is, how good it is to praise Him!

Silent Adoration

Sometimes after praising the Lord, or before or during, it seems right just to be silent and aware of the Lord's presence. It is good to be silent before the Lord.

The Spirit blows where He wills, but it helps to have our bearings.

Sometimes that is what the Spirit is doing in us. To try to pray out loud at that time would be grieving Him. Sometimes we may be silent for the whole prayer period, not in the dead silence of vacuity, or sleep, but in the full silence of awareness of Him.

For God alone, my soul waits in silence (Ps. 62:1).

Be still and know that I am God (Ps. 46:10).

Recently I had an experience that remarkably illustrated how the Spirit leads us at times simply to be still and know that He is God. I had come into work in the morning and wasn't feeling very well at all. I had a headache and felt nauseous. Yet I knew I should attempt my regu-

lar prayer time anyway. But the sound of voices in animated conversation from adjoining offices made it almost impossible to concentrate, on top of feeling ill, so I went to a nearby storeroom and brought in a chair to sit and pray. But I could hardly hold my head up straight it hurt so much, so I leaned forward on to a carton and just rested it there. I could scarcely think straight for the tiredness and the pain but somehow deep in my being I tried to turn to God and just point in His direction, as it were. As I did so, I began to sense that He was there, that He was coming to me and filling me up. In a few minutes, as I held very still, increasingly aware of Him, not moving, or able to say words, not really having the strength to pray, He seemed to comfort me with His Spirit and presence and in a few more minutes the pain had gone away, the headache and nausea were gone, the tiredness was gone, and I was able to joyfully praise Him and sing in the Spirit. This has happened before and since, and it seems to be one of the ways the Lord teaches me about holding still and being silent, and letting Him be God.

Conviction

Sometimes the Spirit will cause us to become aware of something in our life that He wants us to take note of. Sometimes He uses our prayer time to make us aware of something that is not right. Perhaps an offense against a brother that we must make right. Perhaps a fundamental thing that pervades our life and is hard to see because we are so much involved in it. Perhaps something that needs to change in our priorities or schedule, or something that needs to change in our relationship to our wife or children or co-workers. The Spirit is striving to bring forth in us the fullness of the new creation and will be showing us things that need to be changed. We must be open to this work of His. Sometimes take some time in prayer just to ask

Him to show you things, and consider your life before Him, asking for light.

A few years ago, for example, I was praying and I began to have a strong sense that I ought to reflect on my relationship with my wife. The particular area was an area in which I was frequently impatient with her. I felt the Lord was giving me a sense, through His Spirit, that it was never helpful or loving to be impatient in the particular situation, and that I needed to resolve not to respond like that again. That made a major difference in my response in certain situations and resulted in a real change. Things like that periodically happen, and we need to be alert and listen when the Lord speaks to us like this.

Intercession

The Spirit will lead us in our prayer to pray for needs that we and others have. Sometimes our whole prayer time will be taken up with this. At other times the Spirit will not let us intercede, but directs us simply to praise.

Revelation

Sometimes the Spirit will reveal to us a new insight into Christian truth, something about the crucifixion or the second coming, or the forgiveness of sins, or our Father, or about Himself. It may come from reading, it may come directly in prayer; we should let it come, receive it, mull over it, let it bring life to us. Truths given in this manner are a special work of the Holy Spirit and make more difference in our lives than several theology courses on the subject. The Spirit, as Jesus promised, will lead us into all truth, and recall and make vivid to our minds what Jesus has said. Carry this new truth around with you all day, and all night, and all week; rejoice in it, thank God for it, share it with others.

I recall a few months before getting married, sitting on the floor in my room praying and getting a distinct sense that the Lord was showing me that my

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life from now on needed to be based on perfect unity with Him and perfect unity with my wife. He gave me a clear sense that this was to be the basis out of which my life would be fruitful. Since then I've found this "revelation," which is how I experienced it, bearing very good fruit in my life and proving to be absolutely true.

I remember also a few months before that, sitting on the same floor praying, and thinking over a talk I was going to give to some college students on the basic Christian message, when all of a sudden the Spirit began to give me a new understanding of the Trinity—the "revelation" of which has continued to be very important in my personal life and how I experience God.

I believe the Lord wants to reveal truths about Himself and ourselves to all of us. We need to be prepared to "pay attention" when His Spirit begins to "lead us into all truth" (Jn. 16:13).

Rejoicing

Rejoicing can be a part of the elements of prayer already mentioned, particularly praise, but it also can be a distinct prayer of its own. Being glad about what God has done, what God is doing, what God will do, who He is, and His mercy to us, is a form of prayer and is to be yielded to freely. Sometimes I walk around my office just rejoicing and thanking and praising; sometimes I walk down the street rejoicing. This is what Saint Paul tells us to do, not because it is a good idea but because we have every reason to "rejoice always." That is what the Spirit sometimes enables us to do in a special way in prayer.

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes;

yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Lk. 10:21-22).

The method of personal prayer that I am suggesting is very simple. It involves a simple understanding of prayer and reading, and a reasonably balanced, although not absolute, framework for using them together; a reasonable understanding of the variety we can expect to experience in prayer; and a reliance on the Holy Spirit to lead us to the length and manner of prayer that is best at a particular time. The Spirit blows where He wills, but it helps to have our bearings.

From the book *Hungry for God* by Ralph Martin. ©1974 by Ralph Martin. Published by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

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Weapons

I have just finished your issue on "The Media" [July/August '81] and have found it stimulating and to the point.

In Franky Schaeffer's article "The Myth of Neutrality," he points out several useful and effective means of "shining our light"—boycotting, letter writing, etc. However, as Christians we need to remember that these are *secular* processes, and that prayer is still the most powerful weapon of all!

Bryan Borden
Huntsville, TX

A welcome sound from a Living Sound leader

It is with great expectation that I receive my monthly copy of *New Wine Magazine*. As an evangelist and team leader of one of the Living Sound ministry teams, I personally need spiritual food to nourish me as I travel all over the U.S. and Europe. For the past 16 months your publications have helped greatly to sustain me as I preach every day. I also share these with the other fifteen members of my team. Last year I left all of the *New Wine Magazines* and tapes I had with Christian believers in Poland as we left. It was just like Christmas morning for them and me.

Bill Phares
Living Sound International
Wilshire, England

Light brings warmth

Your issue on neighborhoods [Sept. '81] was so good. The neighbors we have only saw us as a "cliche" instead of a "light."

We didn't really need them—unless they were potential prospects for our church. They felt that from us and in turn were very suspicious of us. In the past few weeks we've been able to see our neighbors as potential friends and in offering them a friendship, they've warmed up to us remarkably.

Jesus made it a point to spend time with the sinners. He first "showed" them and then was able to reach them.

Name withheld
Miami, FL

Christian response and responsibility

I appreciate your magazine greatly; the Lord often uses it to speak to me. I like Ern Baxter's article [Sept. '81] on social concerns. I know your stance is usually conservative, but as Rev. Baxter says, a Christian response is what needs to be central. . . . For example, the area of nuclear weapons is one where we must fulfill our responsibility to speak out to the government.

Jim Foxvog
Comer, GA

One body

The interview with Atlanta's Chief of Police [Sept. '81] was full of honesty, candor and even compassion; this is truly a man who *cares* about his city. One other thing that compelled me to write was the fact that Chief Napper mentioned holding Baptist conviction. I am not and never have been denominationally committed, but it blessed me that you do not just seek non-

Dear New Wine,

denominational interviews, you obviously *do* extend the hand of fellowship to all brethren—based not on doctrine, or how much you can agree, but *whom* we know as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Maureen Dignan
East Lansing, MI

Invaluable source

Greetings from the Philippines! I have been receiving *New Wine* since 1974 and have long found it an invaluable source of solid teaching. I particularly appreciate it in my ministry as editor of a small teaching magazine which is sent free to more than 30,000 throughout the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia. Congratulations on your new layout—some of the recent covers in particular have been brilliant.

Michael Bare
Cebu City, Philippines

P.O. Box Z, Mobile, AL 36616

The editorial policy and purpose of *New Wine* is: (1) to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all nations, (2) to work with all Christian ministries for the maturity and unity of His Church, (3) thus making ready a people prepared for the coming of the Lord. We recognize that, according to the Scriptures, God uses men given as ministries to build His Church in the earth. However, the basis of our relationship is not primarily commitment to human personalities, but to Jesus Christ as Head, to the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate standard by which all revelation and practice is to be judged and to God's purpose for His people in the earth at this time, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit. *New Wine* is a non-subscription magazine supported by the voluntary contribu-

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