

Walk with Me
a Little Further

by Steven G. Beam

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Walk with Me a Little Further

(Just for 30 days)

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A GENTLE WHISPER

“After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper...”

1 Kings 19:12

I hate to shop! That’s an understatement. I loathe the activity of walking through a huge shopping mall. It’s pure torture.

However my wife, Nancy, loves to shop! That’s also an understatement. One of her favorite activities is for the two of us to stroll down the shopping mall, hand in hand, as she jumps into every store to see what’s new. Like a bumblebee that must taste every flower, Nancy has to walk up and down every aisle of every store.

Now here’s the trick. How does she get me into the mall? After thirty years of marriage you would think that I would get used to all of her schemes to trap me for an evening of “Honey-bee” strolling. The truth of the matter is that I’m not that smart and she is very clever.

One particular Saturday afternoon we were driving past the mall and she mentioned that she would like to stop and pick up something. “It will just take a minute!” A kind of apology before I could interrupt her with an absolute: “NO!”

So I dropped her off and waited inside the car. Yes, I waited and waited ... until I could wait no longer. Thinking I would find her and yank her back to the car (I told you I wasn’t very smart), I slammed the door and walked in a huff until I finally discovered her a couple of stores down the corridor.

You know the rest of the story. A few minutes later, we are strolling down the mall hand in hand. She buys me an ice cream cone and I sit on the bench with all the other pitiful husbands ... staring off into space. We are in a mall coma ... begging God to get us out of there ... ice-cream dripping off our elbows ... being led from bench to bench as our “Honeybees” flitter from flower to flower.

The noise in those places is so loud; children are screaming, everyone is yelling and talking. Music from the stores are blaring...

the sound of footsteps ... the clamor of bags, shoes, carts and hawkers ...

Then, in the midst of all this noise, I heard my father call my name. "Steve ... Steve." I know my father's voice. So I jumped up and looked all around. But no one was there. Then a few seconds later, the same voice I'd known all my life came again ... "Steve."

The crowds were too thick and I couldn't see him.

Now my father and mother live about four hours away so it was the last voice I thought I would hear. But it was unmistakably my father's voice. I know his calm, soft voice! So I listened for it again in the midst of all the noise ...

HIS VOICE IS THE ONE THAT WE SEEK, THE ONE THAT WE NEED TO TUNE OUR EARS TOWARDS, THE ONE THAT WE NEED TO LISTEN TO. IT'S THE VOICE THAT BRINGS PEACE.

Then he appeared. With a huge smile on his face, he asked if I'd been "tricked" as well? Exchanging embraces with my mother, my Dad and I sat down with our ice-cream cones while my mother and wife flittered from store to store. Somehow the day wasn't so wasted. In fact, I regard that afternoon with my father, sitting on the mall bench (talking about baseball, fishing and whatever men talk about when they are bored) as one of my favorite memories.

In the clamor of life – roads, malls, television, radio, the Internet, the news, the voices – there is only one that will bring peace. That is the "Father's voice." His voice is the one that we seek, the one that we need to tune our ears towards, the one that we need to listen to. It's the voice that brings peace.

I've recorded some of the messages I've heard along my walk of life. I pray that they will bring you peace too.

THE JOURNEY

I fly over 200,000 miles a year ... I've grown very tired of traveling.

After twenty-five years, the intensity of the tiredness grows with every new trip. One time I sat next to newborn twins who screamed and cried all night from New York to Shannon, Ireland. On another all night trip, a huge lady squeezed me out of my seat causing me to lean into the plane's toilet from New York to Bucharest ... add to that, 3-hour delays on the New York and the Paris runways. By the time we got to Bucharest, I was almost dead from the smell and a broken back.

I had a guy fall asleep on my shoulder from Karachi to Frankfurt. He hadn't brushed his teeth nor bathed, but insisted upon using my shoulder as his pillow. I did everything I could to shake him off to no avail.

A long delay can be one of the "joys" of traveling. (Not counting all the times I've been bonked on my head with briefcases, purses or experienced rude flight attendants and drunken passengers). I think my record wait for a flight is 36 hours. Another "joy" of air traveling is the lack of leg room. My six-foot body doesn't fit in those small spaces. Leg cramps, twisted joints, and sore backs are the rewards for long flights ... especially enjoyable on overnight flights. And the seats recline into our faces ... one guy leaned back so far into my lap that I told him: "One inch closer and we'll have to get married!"

There is nothing that makes a flight more "enjoyable" than riding through rough turbulence. I've been on flights where the flight attendants even got sick from the turbulence. The pitfalls of medium turbulence are watching people get sick, luggage fall out of the bins, food sprayed across the cabin ... but it could be worse. It could crash!

I've crashed in a helicopter and had a number of emergency landings. So every time the plane touches down safely, I breathe a prayer of thanks that the trip is OVER!

Then one day I sat next to a very talkative person. "Oh, God," I prayed, "Why me?" Most people will leave you alone if you don't

look at them or smile so I don't. If they prod long enough and want to talk, I tell them I am a Fundamentalist Evangelist!

But this guy wouldn't give up. So finally I opened up and asked him about himself. Seems he was returning to college and was looking for a way to be a missionary? I almost lost the opportunity. From then on, I committed to myself that I would be open for dialogue with whom or where ever God placed me.

Since then I've had many opportunities. One time I sat next to a lady who had just lost her baby in an accident. We prayed together. One young person, on a flight to Singapore, had just become a Christian and was looking for a way to grow in his walk with the Lord, praying for a deeper walk but didn't know where to turn.

IT'S A MATTER
OF FOCUSING ON
THE JOURNEY

Maybe Christianity is that way. Once we are saved, our destination is set. Then it's a matter of focusing on the journey. And it's not a matter of our comfort; it's a matter of our witness. That's the only thing that will really matter after our trip on this earth is over. Maybe our Christian life is one long mission trip with a final stop to our Heavenly home!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: After we are "saved" it's the trip that matters. Think about Jesus' life. Most of the incidents that are recorded about Jesus' life happened "along the way."

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, you are the living water. I am the pipeline. Refresh someone today through me.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." I John 2:6

FLIGHT INSTRUCTIONS: “LET GO!”

K eith Lindley asked me if we could help a fledgling elementary school in Barrillos, Guatemala. It was struggling to survive and yet we had never helped or worked with schools before. I told him “no” but Keith persisted. Eventually he convinced me to take a short trip on a small plane to the Indian village north of Nebaj. It would only take a couple of hours ... famous last words: “Not far ...”

At that time we were developing a medical outreach in Nebaj, Guatemala to reach out to the dying Ixil Indian children. The Civil War in the 1970’s had devastated these people, their farms and communities. Hundreds of children were dying from malnutrition.

From Nebaj it was a twenty minute trip north to Barrillos. I was promised a simple trip through the mountains in a small Cessna Tail Dragger ... well not so simple. They made the mistake of putting me in the right front seat, next to the pilot.

We passed through a few mountain passes and came upon a valley. Along the way, the pilot would point to villages and call out their names. I’d repeat each in affirmation. Finally, the pilot pointed out our destination instructively: “Barrillos.” I nodded. Down below the houses, roads and cars looked smaller than toys. I could barely make out the runway and figured the pilot would circle downward toward the runway.

We did circle, but only halfway down when, to my surprise, the pilot started towards one of the mountains. I pointed to it and said instructively: “Mountain.” The Guatemalan pilot spoke less English than I spoke Spanish but acknowledged that he knew it was a mountain ... that we were headed directly into.

I watched as the plane nosed directly into the side of the mountain. Closer and closer until I could plainly see the trees ...

“MOUNTAIN!” I cried. “Mountain” was his reply.

It was no use. He obviously didn’t see the MOUNTAIN. I had to take matters into my own hands. So I grabbed the wheel and pulled as hard as I could try to avoid the impending crash. And

with all of his might the pilot held the wheel and pushed down.

Yelling in Spanish and English ... we fought over the control of the plane. Finally, we cleared the trees and the hidden runway appeared before my eyes. It was sort of a road and a runway. I let go and he safely landed the plane onto the dirt runway.

Man, was I embarrassed, shaken and confused. Later, it was explained to me that this runway was built until they could completely redo the one in the city. On the way back, the pilot made me sit in the rear of the plane. I don't

remember seeing him ever again. I think I was put on his black list.

Later, I thought about how many times I've given control of my life to the Lord only to take it back because I didn't trust that He knew what He was doing, where He was guiding and whether He really had my security at best interest. Only afterwards would I see that He knew exactly what He was doing. My struggling just made the Pilot's job more difficult!

MY STRUGGLING
JUST MADE THE
PILOT'S JOB MORE
DIFFICULT!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Faith is an action word. With it we can run with God. Trust is faith that rests as God pilots us.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, take complete control of my life and help me to stay out of your way. I don't want to crash.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." Isaiah 26:3

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

It had been a long, hard trip through the scorching desert of Southern India. We were helping to plant new churches among the Tamil Tribe, indigenous to the Kooley Hills.

These people are some of the poorest in the world, living in small mud huts, scavenging for food and walking a kilometer to get to the nearest well.

At the end of our two-week journey, the simple Hotel in Madras was luxury. It had running water, a nice cold shower and a western toilet. All for the whopping sum of \$8 a night! The morning of my departure, I hosted one of the pastors working in this area. He brought along his little ten-year-old daughter and together we sat in the hotel's small café with a cup of tea, discussing our plans.

While the waiter was collecting our orders, I leaned over to his daughter and asked if she wanted anything. She smiled and turned down my offer. She was so cute and shy ... I couldn't let her go without ordering her something. So I inquired if she had ever had ice cream.

She shook her head “no” and so I asked the waiter to bring her some vanilla ice cream. The pastor and I sipped our tea as she gulped the ice cream down. She was delighted, licking every drop. Do you know anyone who doesn't like ice cream?

The waiter brought our bill as we were leaving and it added up to 22 Rupees, about \$1.25. I didn't think anything of it, but when the little girl saw the bill, she began to cry. Terror was written all over her face. It took quite a while for the pastor to calm his dear daughter.

I was shocked and bewildered. “Why,” I inquired, “was she so upset?” I will never forget his reply. “Brother Steve, you don't understand. Twenty-two Rupees is more than we spend in an entire week on food for the whole family!”

I felt terrible. I felt wasteful. I felt guilty. I felt ashamed. My perspective just changed. Continual challenges to our values are healthy for our hearts!

What is opulence? I heard Donald Trump say that he regretted acquiring a \$37 million dollar yacht. He said it was a waste. For another, it is a dish of vanilla ice cream. What about the church?

Where should we be?

I remember walking through a new American church sanctuary. The pastor showed me the marble floors that had been cut and shipped from Italy. “Only the best for God ...” he explained. That same week I sat in a room full of dying children whose parents couldn’t afford to feed them. Can you imagine watching your children starve before your very eyes?

One day I held an armload of children who would never have the opportunity to go to school. Their parents couldn’t afford the \$2 monthly tuition.

Later, I walked through an American church with a pastor whose church just split over the color of the new carpet. The following week, I was back in Asia with Christians who had been tortured for their faith! Then I returned to the U.S. and spoke at a church that warned me not to speak too long ...

CONTINUAL CHALLENGES
TO OUR VALUES ARE
HEALTHY FOR OUR
HEARTS!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: You’ve heard: “What Would Jesus Do?” How about: “What Would Jesus Think?” Why not go on a short-term mission trip to see other parts of the world? It will change your perspective on “Things.”

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me align my thoughts with your thoughts, my actions with your actions, and my priorities with your priorities.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” Matthew 5:3

SAY “YES” TO GOD

The child pressed his face against the windowpane so hard. Maybe he thought he could smell through the glass.

When we ushered him into the fast food cafe, his eyes lit up and within seconds he was standing at attention in front of our table.

Someone moved over and he scooted into place alongside the rest of the “Gringos” in the padded booth. We ordered him a hamburger and a soft drink. He took just a couple of minutes to gulp it down and try to leave.

We asked him to stay for a minute while one of the team members shared the Gospel and told him that Jesus loved him and died on the cross for him. We all prayed with the boy and waved as he walked out of the door.

I don't know what ever happened to the boy, but the experience greatly affected the mission team. One of the young men confessed that he couldn't sleep that following night. He wrestled and cried the entire night. The experience gripped his heart. He felt the burden of these “Street Children,” and poured his heart out to God. That very night he knew that God had placed a special calling on his life to reach out to these abandoned, homeless children living on the streets of the major cities.

So he went home, shared the experience with his new bride and together they sought the Lord. Should they leave their dreams, their jobs, their nice incomes, and their brand new house ... ?

After a great deal of prayer and with the counsel of their pastor, they began to take the initial steps to turn loose of their “things” and to pursue what they believed to be the call of God. Within a year, they were able to be completely liberated and ready to go. After raising their own support, they left for language school, a year of apprenticeship and now they are serving as full-time Missionary Ventures Field Coordinators reaching out to thousands of these children across the country.

I visited one of their feeding centers last week. The little

children sang choruses, heard Bible stories, and ate a nutritious meal. The church, the pastor and his wife embraced this couple as their dearest friends in ministry. They shared how their church was so blessed as a result of this couple's ministry.

Later that evening, we had a special service in the church. Afterwards a well-dressed woman came up to me. She was going to the University nearby and had a responsible position at one of the local shops. She helped the Feeding Center when she wasn't working. As I was leaving, she hugged the missionary couple. They whispered in my ear that she used to be a "street kid" and grew up in this very Feeding Center.

THE RICHNESS OF
THE SOIL THAT GOD'S
WORD IS SPRINKLED ON
IS DETERMINED BY THE
EAGERNESS TO COMPLY.

As we drove back to the mission house that evening I wrapped my jacket around my face so no one could see the tears running down my face. It was cold anyway.

How many children did these missionaries affect because they said "Yes" to God? Only God knows. How fortunate for these people that a long time ago this couple said, "Yes" to God. The richness of the soil that God's word is sprinkled on is determined by the eagerness to comply.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The only things that will matter 100 years from now are the results from your "YES" to God!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, speak to me again ... I promise that my response will be "yes, Lord."

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:8

WORST MISSIONARY JOKES

Do you want to hear the worst missionary jokes in the world?

How can you tell if a missionary has been on the field for one year? A fly lands in his soup and you watch him dump the soup out. How can you tell if he has been on the field for five years? A fly lands in his soup; he takes a spoon and scoops out the fly and eats the soup. How can you tell if a missionary has been living on the field for more than ten years? The fly lands in his soup ... he grabs the fly by the throat and says: "Spit it out, spit it out!"

Here's another one: A missionary family was traveling from church to church raising their support. After several months of being bounced from town to town, church to church, home-to-home, they ended up staying with a pastor and his family. That Sunday morning the pastor got up and asked them if they were tired of going from home to home and sleeping in a different bed every night. The missionary got up and explained that he wasn't so bothered by using a different bed each night as he was using a different toothbrush every morning!

Sorry, they are bad. Can you stand another one? A missionary was preaching in a remote part of Africa. A crowd was gathered to hear him. As he was speaking, a group of men started to raise their spears and shields, jumping up and down shouting "Bunga-Bunga!" Soon the entire crowd was hopping up and down shouting "Bunga-Bunga!" The missionary thought he was really getting through to them, so he proceeded to preach for several hours. Each time he caught his breath, the crowd went through the same routine, shouting "Bunga-Bunga!"

After the program, his interpreter escorted the missionary across an open field to a bungalow where he would spend the night. As they crossed the field, the interpreter warned him that the field was used by cows and to be careful ... there was a lot of "bunga" on the ground!

Can you handle just one more? I think that this is the worst one of all.

A family grows up in the community church and slowly becomes involved in missions by going on several short-term mission trips. One day they announce their call to full-time missions. The pastor and church voice their support and pray diligently for them. They get ready to go ... with tears in their eyes the church takes up an offering for \$200 and pledge their monthly support of \$25. Each week, the pastor asks for prayer for “Their Missionary.”

A year or so later, the church gets involved in a huge building campaign and writes “Their Missionary” telling them that they will no longer be able to support them. Their ten million dollar building program will consume their entire attention. But they want them to know that they will be praying for them and that they will maintain their calling to become a missionary sending church. By the way, could they make it to their annual missions fair this year?

WHAT PERCENTAGE
OF THE CHURCH
IS CALLED TO
MISSIONS?

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: What percentage of the church is called to missions? What percent of believers are to sacrifice for the lost? “The entire congregation” is the correct answer.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, there is a hurting missionary out there that needs me. Show me that missionary and how I can help.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “... he said, ‘Is it not written: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.”’” Mark 11:17

HUMBLLED AGAIN!

It took two days and nights to get to Madras, India. Arriving at midnight, we must have looked a bit weary because our hosts asked us if we wanted to rest or were able to continue on.

Tom Kimbrough and I looked at each other and agreed we could go on. “How much further?” we asked, thinking that we had only an hour to go. “Not far. Not far,” they answered.

And so it went from midnight until 5:00 PM the next day. For seventeen hours we sat in the back of the Ambassador sedan. Our knees tucked under our chins, guzzling water by the liter on the hot, humid, desert drive. No air conditioning, rolled down windows that collected heat, dust and street smells ... for seventeen hours. Like children bored on a long journey we wanted to know: “How much further?”

The reply was always the same: “Not far. Not far.”

We finally stopped at the home of a pastor near the town of Trivandrum on the southern tip of India. What a long trip ...

After dinner, I asked for our rooms. The reply came as an announcement that I was to speak that evening. Before I could shut my dropped jaw, another pastor interrupted to say that they had rented an amplifier and loudspeakers so that the message could be broadcast across the community.

So I spoke that night and presented the Gospel. Several people came forward for prayer and we retired that evening close to ten. It was an incredible week, with each day providing more opportunities to share the Gospel, meet with pastors, plan for a Bible school ... we learned again how far is “Not far!”

For two weeks we traveled thousands of kilometers, through deserts and scorching heat. On our final day, I looked over at Tom and asked him how I looked. We hadn't showered or shaved for a few weeks. Tom looked bad and so did I ... but we were happy in the Lord and proud of our sacrifice on this trip ... until we met this precious Indian pastor.

We stopped the car on a hillside and walked through the brush about a kilometer to a small village of mud and straw huts. As we

walked through the village, I noticed how small the huts and people were. Our host explained that this was one of the poorest areas of our outreach. The water was bad and many of the people were malnourished and sickly. The only means of survival for the people was to scavenge for food in the hills.

A villager appeared and muttered something in our host's ear. He turned to us and pointed to some tracks on the ground. A tiger had visited the village the night before and taken the pastor's only goat. We finally came upon the pastor who proudly introduced us to some of the families that had come to the Lord. One by one, he introduced them to us and told how they had come to Christ. He had only been there for a year but was encouraged by the new believers.

THE DEGREE OF OUR
LOVE IS NOT MEASURED
IN HOW MUCH WE GIVE
BUT IN HOW MUCH WE
SACRIFICE!

As we walked back to the car, I turned to look once more at the village. How would I have fared working here? I don't think I would have gone very "far." No water, no food, no beds, no houses – nothing but extreme mud, filth, sickness and poverty. Tears ran down my cheeks. I haven't done anything for Jesus ... nothing like this. I was humbled again.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The degree of our love is not measured in how much we give but in how much we sacrifice!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, my life is so comfortable. Show me where and what I can do for you that will bring glory to you ... even if it means a sacrifice.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:27

THE BASEBALL GAME OF LIFE

I pastored five churches in ten years. The fact that I was in three denominations during this time doesn't help. And if you really dug into my ministerial history, you would discover that three of these churches and two of these denominations asked me to leave! One church fired me, another laid me off, and the other just stopped paying me. (Some guys just can't take a hint!)

Yet, it was within this arena of failure, that Missionary Ventures was birthed. Amazing how the failures of life can become the soil in which success is grown. Failure makes good fertilizer!

I remember my first season in Little League Baseball. I always wanted to be a pitcher. So I pitched for the first few games. We lost because of "poor pitching." But the coach noticed that I could scoop up every ball hit within my reach. So he asked me to play shortstop and we started winning. Sometimes it's not the game, it's the position that is wrong.

Isn't this true of life? It's a matter of making adjustments, changes, learning from our mistakes and finding out what is better and going with it.

Richard and Lesley (not their real names) came to me with the vision of becoming our missionaries. When we met though, I discovered that he had been in full-time ministry but his church dissolved and he and his first wife divorced. They had been kicked out of their denomination. However, they had a good reference from their existing pastor.

After extensive interviews, our personnel committee and I felt that we should give them a chance again. So we sent them to Eastern Europe. To our amazement, they excelled in this outreach and pioneered a huge ministry around reaching abandoned street children. It became such a huge success that they started their own missionary organization to focus in on this work. We were privileged to help them get started and blessed them as they pioneered a new missionary organization to focus on these children.

As I've grown older, I've discovered that life is a lot like a

baseball game. If we live long, we basically have nine innings. I've played and watched a lot of baseball. I've seen teams and players have very bad innings, even losing by ten or more runs by the seventh inning stretch. Then I've watched them come back the second half of the last inning and win the game.

There is so much more "glory" when these teams come back from so far behind. Everyone cheers, screams and dances. It's a great thrill to watch.

I've seen the same with people. Sometimes we can have a bad first inning, maybe a terrible first five innings. Maybe we can be losing going into the last inning of our life. Maybe we can have a good inning,

then a bad one ... then a terrible one. Then a few runs ... whatever ... the point is that there are many innings to our life ... to your life. You can still win the game!

I've seen many players strike out the entire game and then hit a grand slam in the bottom of the ninth to win the game. They go from losers to heroes with one swing. At the same time, I've seen many teams go eight innings with flawless play and then lose the game in the last second! Tell me this. When should we start the judgment party? How about if we wait until the game is over!

TELL ME THIS. WHEN
SHOULD WE START THE
JUDGMENT PARTY? HOW
ABOUT IF WE WAIT UNTIL
THE GAME IS OVER!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: What inning is it in your life?

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to win the game.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14

SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT!

We were having problems with our sewer system and decided to have the septic tank pumped. The guy came late in the afternoon and I happened to get home while he was working.

A big suction truck and tank were sitting in the driveway. A burley man in overalls was holding a long coiled hose from the truck, standing over the tank vacuuming out the foulest soup of debris I'd ever seen. It's hard to believe it came from "my" family.

I stood beside him for a minute when he turned to me and asked me what I did for a living. "I raise money for missions," I answered. He flicked his cigarette into the tank and muttered: "Well, I guess somebody's got to do it!"

This humorous illustration has often times helped me keep my sanity in the crazy world of fund-raising. A sense of humor is essential for longevity in missions, especially in this area of fund-raising.

One more thing that has made this job impossible is that the church (generally speaking) has done somewhat of a disservice in lifting up such missionary greats as George Mueller who gained fame for never asking, only praying for help. Mueller's "Not Asking" became the theologically equivalence of godliness. However, he was blessed with a good friend who published his needs in the local newspaper.

Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't support this theology of "not asking." Moreover, if you read the Apostle Paul's letters, you will notice that fund-raising is a major part of his writing, either asking or thanking his partners. Read Romans 15:24; II Corinthians 8 and 9 and Philippians 4:9ff.

In fact, humility and sharing one another's burdens is part of virtuous Christian living. Entire denominations have been established based on these Biblical principles of sharing and caring.

Yet for some reason, it's considered taboo, wrong, sinful, immoral, lacking in faith and the "low" path of the missionary's walk. The Biblical pattern is to share our concerns, our needs, and

our problems. The Bible clearly tells us to ask for help when we need it especially for Kingdom activity. In that way we develop a strong nexus of partnership that strengthens and empowers the work. Read II Corinthians 9, for example.

But I think the real reason behind this theology is pride. We are too proud to ask for help. We think it turns us into “beggars.” Yet at the same time, it’s okay to ask for investments of great risk. This is considered “Okay.”

The truth of the matter is that there is only one sure investment and that is into the Kingdom of

God. Read II Corinthians 9 again. It is the only investment that is eternal. It is the only investment that promises multiple returns. And it is the only investment that will matter in 100 years.

Maybe we need to raise our heads into the “glorious riches of the inheritance of the saints...”

THE TRUTH OF THE
MATTER IS THAT THERE
IS ONLY ONE SURE
INVESTMENT AND THAT IS
INTO THE KINGDOM OF
GOD.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, take my life and let it be consecrated for your use. Take my silver and my gold ...

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:3-6

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE CROSS?

I first encountered the “Persecuted Church” (Christians who are imprisoned, tortured, murdered, discriminated against, etc.) in Guatemala. The stories from the Mayan pastors in the northern mountains set my hair on end. So many pastors were butchered during the civil war, many of them carried out during a worship service, only to be found in the morning in a nearby woods decapitated or with their throats slit.

This same thing was prevalent throughout El Salvador and in Nicaragua. Then when we started working in India. The SST Hindu squads were beating several of our pastors and trying to run them out of their villages. Then we started working in Romania, Russia, China and Vietnam. We heard worse stories of lost loved ones; Christian brothers and sisters imprisoned, raped and tortured. These accounts even paled when compared to the incredible persecution that the Christians in the Muslim world face each day as they are made to watch as their children are butchered in front of them. Or their children are made to look on as their fathers are dragged off, never to be seen again ...

Obviously, my heart went out to these brothers and sisters and we have poured out every penny we can to help them. I wish I had several million dollars each year to assist them ... it’s hard to believe but there have been more martyrs of the Faith in this last generation than in all of history!

There were two things that have struck me about working with the Persecuted Church. The first is the dichotomy of theological emphasis between the East and West. The second is the difference of priorities.

In the West, some of the big theological emphases deal with prosperity, gathering and accumulating wealth, health, comfort and happiness. In the East, Christians are saying: “How can it get any worse? What do you mean the coming Tribulation? We are in it!”

In the East, they speak of the “Cross.” They encourage each other with identifying with the sufferings of Christ, those of the

first Christians and the other martyrs of the faith.

In the Western Church it is common to glorify God through having the best, going first class and spending millions of dollars on buildings. In developing countries, people meet on dirt floors, under thatched roof churches ... they kneel in the dirt to pray.

Amongst the Persecuted Church it is common to hear messages about suffering for the Lord. Sermons on sacrifice, the Blood of Christ, the cost of discipleship, the virtues of patience and perseverance are common. In the West, it is not often that you hear these words, let alone

an entire message about these themes.

LORD, SHOW ME HOW I
CAN REALLY GLORIFY YOU
TODAY.

Yesterday, we were challenged to help 160 families relocate because of persecution in their

Vietnamese village. Each family needed \$100 to get resettled and start a little farm. Eleven pastors were put into prison in Pakistan. Could we help their families? Then I heard that one of the pastors we were helping to plant a church in Western Nepal was poisoned.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: “The cross is something that I choose to pick up; it is voluntary.” Joseph Tson (Persecuted in Romania)

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Forgive us our sins, I pray, those sins of commission and those of omission. Lord, show me how I can really glorify you today.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24

FAITH AND FEAR

We were rolling through the desert at a pretty good pace. I was glad. It was very hot. Dust and humidity hung in the air. There was brown steam literally rising from the ground.

Wham! The car hit a rock. Fortunately, the driver was able to swerve to the side without incident. We all piled out of the car and knelt to look underneath. It was a terrible sight to see the oil pouring out of a gaping hole in the side of the crankcase.

“Great!” I thought. “We’re stuck here for days.” I was tired and didn’t want to show my anger or fear so I turned to the side of the road to pray. When I returned to the car, the driver asked if I had any soap. I figured he just wanted to wash his hands so I dug out a bar of soap from my luggage. To my amazement he wadded up the soap in his hand and began to knead it like dough. Crawling under the car, he plugged up the hole with the soft soap.

He took out a couple of cans of oil and filled the engine up again and away we went ... for two more days we made it through the desert and to Salem. We decided not to “press our luck” anymore and to take the train to Madras, India.

Later, we all talked and laughed about the journey, our successes and failures. One thing for sure, we all felt that it was important to start a small Bible school. So we proceeded to put together plans and budgets.

As the numbers started adding up for the school, I began to slide down my chair. Where is this money going to come from? A cloud of fear swept across my spirit and I began to “back off from the idea.” The table grew quiet and about that time, I happened to look up.

We were sitting in a small café at the corner of the station waiting for our train. There were several in the area. And there were several tables in this particular station. We just happened to sit at this particular table under a poster hanging on the wall just above our hosts. It captured my attention just long enough to make its point.

It was a beautiful picture of the huge rock cliffs that rise above the shores of Acapulco, Mexico. A high diver had just left the cliff a few feet from the edge, arms stretched forward making the first movements of a long drop to the water below.

Across the bottom of the poster were the words: “Faith is fear that takes the leap anyway.”

I choked down my soda and apologized. We were going to go forward.

That night, I meditated on that poster, hung just where my eyes could catch it at just the right time. It was more than a coincidence. God was saying: “It’s okay to be afraid, just don’t let it stop you. Continue.”

HONESTLY, I GET
AFRAID. AND WHEN I DO,
I SPEND MORE TIME WITH
GOD.

I have often thought about that poster and talked to others who have failed trying to have the faith to do things for God. Maybe faith is easier for others than me. Honestly, I get afraid. And when I do, I spend more time with God. Being in His presence gives me more awareness of His strength, His might, His ability, His wealth, His power ... and this gives me more confidence to go forward.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: It’s okay to be afraid. Just don’t let fear become a “stop sign.” Let it simply become a signal to spend more time with God.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.” Mark 9:29

GUILT AND OTHER FUND-RAISING TECHNIQUES

The idea of raising money for missions really is difficult to understand. On the one hand you have many who proclaim quite properly:
“Where God guides, He provides.” Or “If it’s God’s will, He will pay the bill.”

I like both sayings and think that they are good theology. But what method did Jesus use to marshal resources? The Bible gives us many incidents in which Jesus needed something and how it was fulfilled. One time He needed some food for himself and a crowd of over 5000 men (not counting women and children). The disciples were sent out to raise some capital and came back with only five loaves and two fish.

I know the frustration the disciples must have felt that day. So do a lot of other fund-raisers. That’s why you get so much of it in the mail, on the radio and on television. We all come up short.

So what does God say about fund-raising?

1. God uses people to meet needs. He asks us to give. He even asks us to ask others to give.
2. God uses and blesses what we give.
3. Ultimately the great supply we need comes from God. He is glorified and we are left to proclaim: “Look what God has done!”

We are instructed in II Corinthians 9:7 to “give generously, cheerfully and not under compulsion.”

Today, we are under attack from different worthy (and unworthy) fund-raising methods. We are usually “compelled” to give for five different reasons:

1. Fear: “If you don’t give our program will go off the air.”
2. Guilt: “If you don’t give 10,000 African children will die next month.” Or “If you don’t give, the homosexuals will take over Cincinnati!”
3. Greed: “If you give God will make you rich ...”
4. Ego: “If you give we’ll put your name on the wall of the

building ...”

5. Pity: “Just look at the emaciated child ...”

Let me tell you what I think is the best type of fund-raising:
Tell what God is doing
and ask people to join
you as you join God.

What is God doing?
That’s what I want to be
a part of. Don’t you?

In this way, it is a joy
(cheerful) to participate.

The Lord loves a

cheerful giver and so does everyone else. And what a joy it is to
participate in some activity that you know God is spearheading.

AND WHAT A JOY IT IS
TO PARTICIPATE IN SOME
ACTIVITY THAT YOU KNOW
GOD IS SPEARHEADING.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Find out what God is doing and join Him. Become a partner with the Lord. He can pay for anything He does!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to see what you are doing, what you are blessing, and what you are thinking. Give me YOUR vision that I might propel all my worth into what you are doing.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” II Corinthians 9:8

EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD GO ON A SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP

WE ARE COMMANDED TO GO. I don't think Jesus intended the Great Commission for a handful of people. He intended it for everyone. Our prayer should not be: "Lord, if you tell me to go I'll go." It should be: "Lord, if you want me to stay, I'll stay; otherwise I'll go as you have commanded." There is joy in fulfilling God's commands.

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL. It's hard to believe, but there are over 2.5 billion people who have never heard the Gospel. How is it that soft drink companies can advertise, sell and distribute their product anywhere and everywhere, and we can't? Or won't? The work of God was never meant to be in the hands of a few. It's like sports. There are a handful of players on the field that desperately need a rest and there is a multitude in the bleachers watching who desperately need the exercise! There is such joy in getting into the game!

THE LABORERS ARE FEW. Jesus knew it (Matt. 9:37) and so does everyone in missions. There are people groups with millions who have only one or two missionaries. How can this be? What department store manager would put most of his sales people in only part of the store? A prudent manager would spread his staff across the entire store.

By going, **WE CAN BRING MISSIONARIES AND INDIGENOUS PASTORS MUCH-NEEDED HELP AND SUPPLIES.** You can bring 140 pounds of supplies in your luggage – food, medicine, clothing, mail, tools. Supplies are badly needed. Your ticket is worth a lot to those in need of them. There is such joy in the fellowship of those who are "going" and you will find such joy in giving.

By going, **YOU BECOME AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS.** Haven't you been alone ... or lonely? No place is lonelier than working in a different culture with people speaking

a different language ... I have seen missionaries weep at the sight of mail from home, a newspaper from home or a hug from their home church family. When you give joy, it will come back to you.

GOING TO THE MISSION FIELD WILL MOTIVATE YOU TO PRAY. It will educate your prayers and you will be a more informed communicator of needs and challenges. You'll know them personally and will be able to pray with fervor and with joy as God responds. (James 5:16)

A SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP IS A GOOD WAY TO DISCOVER IF GOD WANTS YOU IN FULL-TIME MISSIONS. Over 90% of all full-time missionaries get started by going on a short-term missions trip. During the trip they sense the joy of the Lord and the reality of knowing how much they really could be used in missions.

HOW IS YOUR "JOY"
LEVEL TODAY? DO
YOU NEED JOY? GIVE
YOURSELF AWAY AND
YOU WILL FIND TRUE JOY.

IT WILL CHANGE YOUR PROSPECTIVE

ON LIFE. Like the little boy who lamented that he didn't have new shoes until he found a boy with no feet. Where there is contentment you will find joy.

IT WILL GIVE YOU JOY! It is surprising how many Christians are depressed and unfulfilled. And yet Jesus promised us abundant life. It is because they have never found the secret to joy ... giving themselves away!

How is your "Joy Level" today? Do you need joy? Give yourself away and you will find true joy.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Joy will not come to you. You must go and find it. And when you have found where it is, you will sell all that you have to be in the center of it.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, I empty myself that you might fill me with your joy. I submit myself that you might lead on paths of joy. I give myself to you that you might use me.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”
Mark 8:35

HEAVEN AND HELL

What's the matter?" someone asked.

Within a few minutes, it became apparent what had happened. This widow just lost her son. He had died the day before from worms and malnutrition. She was overwhelmed with grief. And to compound her sadness, she didn't have the money to bury the boy. Neither did her neighbors. Somehow, we all felt it was the Lord's providence that we had walked by at that time.

In Nicaragua, because of the heat and lack of embalming facilities, you must bury the dead within twenty-four hours. It costs about \$15 to bury the dead and it must be done within a day. It's a double tragedy for the poor.

After making burial arrangements, we walked with her back to her little shack made of cardboard, tin and dirt floor. Her son lay on a table perched in the middle of the floor. The rest of the children were roaming around like naked chickens, squawking and crying. They were afraid, dirty and suffered the same physical problems. I walked over and placed my hand on the dead boy's body. Speaking softly and calmly, we prayed. The place grew quiet and the children seemed to settle down.

Something within me wanted to pray and ask God to bring the boy back to life. I was tempted to ask when a meek little voice came into my heart. It was almost as if I could hear the little child begging me not to send him back to this world. A sense of joy and happiness overcame me and I knew he was in Heaven ... and he didn't want to come back.

I have often thought that one reason why Jesus wept as he walked to the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35) was because He was going to have to bring Lazarus back to this world!

If we are not Christians, this world will be the only Heaven we will ever know. If we are Christians, this world will be the only Hell we will ever know!

Looking over the dead boy and peering around at his brothers and sisters, another thought came to my mind. We are too late

for this dead child but not too late for the rest of them. So we went to work to set up a Feeding Center, target some local pastors and churches and to work directly with this family and the other “squatters.” Within a few weeks, many of our friends came through with some large gifts and we now have a major Feeding Center operation there.

No one will ever be able to know the grief of this mother and her family. No one will ever be able to understand the daily horrors of poverty such as this. Somehow, though, I think that our job isn't so much to bring the dead back from heaven but to bring heaven to them.

IF WE ARE NOT
CHRISTIANS, THIS
WORLD WILL BE THE
ONLY HEAVEN WE WILL
EVER KNOW. IF WE ARE
CHRISTIANS, THIS WORLD
WILL BE THE ONLY HELL
WE WILL EVER KNOW!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: How much of Heaven are you experiencing today? How much of Hell? Whatever degree you are experiencing is but a drop in the ocean of eternity.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to be a reflection of heaven. Help me to love the hurting, help the destitute, care for the orphan, embrace the ugly, listen to the lonely, bring hope to the helpless, salvation to the poor, and life to the dying. In the midst of this activity, may all see you and give you thanks.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’” Luke 7:22

ANGELS, MINISTERING SPIRITS

Someone asked me if I believe in miracles. “Miracles?” I replied, “I need ten of them today or we’re not going to make it.”

He went on to ask me if I believe in angels. “Angels? We ask God to send them every day.”

Here’s why: The mountain roads in Guatemala can be treacherous to drive through, especially with a vanload of people and supplies. The roads are in poor repair and have huge holes and sometimes there is only one lane to drive on. And you can’t cling to the sides of the mountains, as they are usually crowded with huge buses and crowds waiting to board them. And you also have to look for animals: cows, sheep and chickens frequent the roads as much as people.

This particular trip we were zipping around a mountainside on our way to Huehuetenango. We had just crested the peak of the mountain and were making our way down into the valley. As the van picked up momentum, I noticed a calf standing on the side of the road. No problem, they can stand on the side all they want. It’s when they decide to cross that you are in trouble.

Just as we neared the animal decided to make a break for the other side. We were going to collide, van and animal. We would win but what damage would it do to us, the van, and could it be enough of a jolt to hurl us off the side of the mountain?

At just the last second the calf stopped, and I watched as its neck was turned away from us, giving us a half-inch to pass by. The entire bus broke out in praise choruses. We had been rescued.

I have been in accidents in just about every country we work in and every time, someone or something has rescued us. A cement truck in Montserrat hit me. One day we crashed in a helicopter in Canada. I’ve been hit by a bus in Indonesia. We crashed a plane in the West Indies. One day a car just missed us in Russia.

There was the day we traveled throughout the mountains and just as we returned to the mission house, one of the wheels just

dropped off. Another day the radiator blew in a coastal jungle. We coasted down the hill coming to stop at ... at a radiator shop out in the middle of nowhere!

We've been stranded in hurricanes in Honduras, in the desert of south India, in remote Pakistan, the mountains of Nepal, the freezing cold of Russia and in the middle of robbers in Nigeria.

DO I BELIEVE IN ANGELS?
BELIEVE IN THEM, WE
COUNT ON THEM!

I can't tell you how many times I thought, "This is it," only to be rescued at the last second. I've been rescued from a crazy man waving a gun at me. One time, we were running away from thieves in Romania when a woman came out of a shop and literally tackled the thieves giving us time to escape. (Note here: A woman rescued us!)

Do I believe in Angels? Believe in them, we count on them!
How about you? Need some help today?

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: To believe in the supernatural is up to you. You can believe and receive. Or you can doubt and pout.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, send forth your ministering angels today that they might help me overcome the enemy.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Hebrews 1:14

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

A young missionary came to me lamenting his recent failure. So I recounted some of mine to make him feel better.

Since this page doesn't have enough room, I'll mention a big one that just happened that day:

A Pakistani pastor and I had become good friends. I had visited his home in Pakistan many times and he had been in mine. We had worked together for 8 years developing ministries, planting churches and pioneering schools in much of Pakistan. We had just sent him a large sum of money we had received from a nearby foundation to start an educational program for the middle-class in one of their major cities. It was an attempt to try to bridge this culture and to reach these people for Christ.

Unfortunately, I had over estimated this brother's sincerity and his honesty. The day after he cashed the check he faxed me a note saying the project was off and he was going to keep the money.

In missions, we must trust many people. In our ministry of facilitating Indigenous Christian leaders, we can be duped. Not often, but it happens. We have missionaries now in most places where we work so there is always on-sight accountability. Back then we didn't. And he tricked me.

I ended up going to the Foundation and admitting our mistake and our failure. It was very embarrassing. To my amazement, the director of the foundation shrugged it off and asked me what I had learned from this.

From that time onward I knew that whatever mistake I would make would cost ... but it must be categorized as "Tuition Payments."

We think that when we leave the University, we stop making tuition payments. Not so. We make them all through our lives. Some call it the "School of Hard Knocks." Either way, we will continue to make tuition payments until we die.

That's another secret I've learned. As long as we don't quit we will always come out victorious. See Romans 8. The only way we

can be defeated is if we quit. And the only way the enemy can win is to get us to quit. So he does everything and anything he can do to get us so frustrated, so discouraged, so depressed, so filled with self-pity that we quit. But if we don't quit, we will see the Lord turn it around and use it for

His good. He always turns the evil that happens to us around to become the same degree of good that happens.

For example: The worst thing that could have

happened to humanity was to kill the Savior. As it turned out, the best thing that could have happened to humanity was that the Savior be crucified ...

AND WE WILL CLIMB TO
THE LEVEL OF THAT FOR
WHICH WE ARE WILLING TO
PAY THE TUITION!

One more secret, the tuition payments keep getting bigger and bigger the more we try to do for God. Sacrificial life for the Lord doesn't get easier. It gets harder! (Unless we stop growing in the Lord and doing more for Jesus.) How about that?

Everyone thinks it gets easier to do the will of the Lord ... it doesn't. Just like our own scholastic careers, the higher the degree the more it costs. And we will climb to the level of that for which we are willing to pay the tuition!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: There is no such thing as failure in God's economy. There are quitters but not failures.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, turn failures into success and to the same degree.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "... because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:3-4

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

You can usually tell a lot about a person's basic theology by how they pray. I can usually tell a lot about their faith by their excuses.

Rick Walden was fighting cancer but still wanted to go on this mission trip. He had been in and out the hospital with a number of different surgeries, different chemotherapies and all kinds of prayer. Yes, "all kinds of prayer."

So I asked some of the men helping me to lead the team what they thought. One of them offered to take care of Rick during the trip if we agreed to let him go. We prayed and felt it was okay with the Lord.

We spent that week, for the most part, with a squatter's village and a new congregation on the outskirts of Guatemala City that was named for the date of the great earthquake in 1976. That week we visited homes, helping families destitute from the earthquake and held special services.

Usually, during the service we would push Rick to the center stage and let him share his testimony and his struggle. He shared about his walk with the Lord through this battle with cancer. Interestingly, Rick had a great rapport with these people who were struggling with their own personal tragedies. Each night they would line up to be prayed for by Rick. And each night they would gather around him and pray. The last night all the children gathered around him, laid their little hands on his frail body and prayed. There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

After the trip Rick called to thank me for letting him go and said that it was one of the most rewarding experiences he had ever had. I thanked him for being brave enough to come on the trip and said his witness helped make the trip a success. He died about three months later.

I've often thought about this in light of so many excuses I've heard through the years; excuses for not going on a mission trip ...

One of my favorites is the "fear factor." People are naturally

afraid for their lives in a new environment. I had one lady tell me that she was backing out because this particular country had been given a “Travelers Advisory” by the government. I asked her if she realized that Florida had the same “Travelers Advisory” from the German government.

She yelped and said she lived in Florida. I told her she had better get out!

Another one of my favorites is the “I don’t have anything to give” excuse. Now I’ve watched as a woman stayed at an orphanage and held a dying baby

for one week, saving the child’s life. The baby started to recover when it was bathed with so much love and attention. I’ve also watched people come to Christ after someone shared a testimony who had never spoken before an audience before. I’ve watched as businessmen pick up trolls and laid block for the first time in their lives ... and love every minute of it.

One thing I’ve seen, it’s usually not our strengths that God uses and gets the most glory out of. It’s usually our weaknesses.

... IT’S USUALLY NOT
OUR STRENGTHS THAT
GOD USES AND GETS
THE MOST GLORY OUT
OF. IT’S USUALLY OUR
WEAKNESSES.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: What is your greatest weakness? What is your greatest strength? Is it possible that people could see the Lord work in both?

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, I submit my strengths and weaknesses to you. Use them both for Your glory.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:10

BEING PATIENT

Have you ever been desperate?

The reason why I get desperate is because I'm out of sync with God's timing. I feel pressure from circumstances and that makes me pressure God. My prayer has always been: "God, you've got eternity, but I've just got till Friday."

Then fear sets in because I begin to think of all the things that might go wrong. Fear breeds more fear and this burdens me with incredible stress.

On one such day ... I was stressing out with God, hammering on my car dash, yelling, claiming, demanding His attention. All the while driving down a major road in downtown Orlando. Then traffic came to an abrupt halt and I found myself behind a convertible loaded with teenage boys stopped behind a city bus. From my truck I could see the guys yelling and screaming at the stalled bus. They were making obscene gestures and swearing at the bus driver. It was taking longer than usual for him to drop off his passengers.

The traffic was so busy making it impossible to pass. I could only remain there watching these young men vent their fury at the driver and the bus. Finally there was a break in the traffic and the boys squealed around the bus screaming and swearing at the top of their lungs.

A few seconds later the door of the bus opened wide and another drama opened its curtain. The father stepped down and turned around. He was helping his crippled son try to maneuver down the steps and out the door. I watched as he tenderly lifted his legs and guided his body, braces and crutches down the sidewalk. It was slow and tedious work for them both, but somehow it touched my heart in a very profound way that day. It was as if God was giving me a visual picture of my spiritual adolescence. The comparison between the rage of the youth in the convertible and the patience and diligence of the caring father was overwhelming.

In a day of fast food, speedy service, instant everything, time

saving, get-rich quick ... lifestyles I need to be reminded that God doesn't operate or submit to my time schedules. It is I who must learn to submit to His.

Perhaps this is why it is sometimes difficult for me to pray.

Because God often doesn't say "yes" or "no." Many times He says: "Wait." I can't stand to be patient. I don't like to wait in lines, in checkout counters, in restaurants, in traffic. I want to be free.

I have never prayed for patience because I could never wait for it

to come! In the olden days they used to call this "striving." Striving was trying to do something on your own because you couldn't wait on God. The goal, then, is to stop striving and get in sync with God. The objective of prayer can be to get God in sync with us or it can become a journey of keeping in time with Him.

THE OBJECTIVE OF
PRAYER CAN BE TO GET
GOD IN SYNC WITH US
OR IT CAN BECOME A
JOURNEY OF KEEPING IN
TIME WITH HIM.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Prayer is presenting our requests to God but it is also listening to the requests of God, to get in sync with God and to come under submission to His will in our life.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to understand what you are doing around me, in preparation for me, and within me so that I might not be anxious for anything but step in the shadow of your steps.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

PRODIGAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS

I knew these Christian leaders really well. We were about the same age. We both got married when we were nineteen and immediately entered the ministry believing that God had a great destiny for us to fulfill.

Through the hard work of this couple, the ministry grew from a few thousand members, a small two-room office and a struggling ministry into a worldwide outreach. They were active in many countries around the globe because of their hard work and faithfulness. The day that he resigned there were over 80,000 members involved just in the US. A huge complex had just been built covering one full acre on a 100-acre mountaintop for their conferences and rallies. On top of all this they were raising almost two million dollars each year for evangelism and missions.

They were powerful speakers, dynamic Charismatic leaders and my friends. So it was a shock when I heard through the “gossip trail” that he resigned and filed for divorce. I cried.

About every month that year I would read or hear about another friend or associate in ministry that had “fallen.” Many in our Christian circles were reeling from the reports. Some asked: “What had gone wrong?” Others just condemned them.

Can I share a few thoughts with you? The first is that it is important that we only worship God, only look to God as our savior. I would often watch as this Christian leader sat and forty people were waiting in line to speak to him, be prayed for by him and be “blessed.” I felt sorry for him. Too much was expected of him. I remember listening to his voice as it cracked ... he was under so much stress trying to raise the money for a huge construction project. We would send him what we could. But it was an incredible project. God did it, but I think it “killed” this leader. I think that he was looking for a way out. A way out of a world of being “overwhelmed.”

Now listen, there is no excuse for his method of escaping. It hurt so many people ... but I understand. I remember listening to

reports from a famous evangelist as he cried and told us that unless he got 1.8 million dollars God was going to take his father home to heaven. When I asked another friend in the ministry what he thought about that, his reply was simply, “You know, I’ve felt that same way!” I shook my head and said, “So have I.”

The second thing that I want to say is that I don’t know why the church is so astonished

that this has happened. Isn’t the Bible filled with examples of “fallen” leaders? In fact, it is hard to find one that didn’t! The fact of the matter is the Bible beautifully paints these people using all of their true colors.

The exciting part was how God crafted these people over a life time to become and accomplish His will ... many times their most powerful work was after they were remolded ... after they fell and broke. Maybe God isn’t so astonished at how human we are? Maybe He is still able to take the broken pieces and make something beautiful with them?

ISN'T THE BIBLE FILLED
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THOUGHT FOR TODAY: There may be many who are bankrupt and broken because of bad decisions but never without hope. The hope is always in His ability to take our worst and turn it into His best, our least into His greatest, our poverty into His richest, our most painful ... into His most glorious.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, my destiny is between you and me. Help me to fix my eyes on you and to love my brothers and sisters especially the fallen warriors.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

SHUT DOORS



One day we were driving a team down to the coast of Guatemala. Our van started boiling over and the engine started overheating. So I turned the engine off and coasted down the hill coming to a rest in front of a little Guatemalan tienda (store). We popped the hood up to discover that the top gooseneck to the radiator had come completely off. The hose to the engine was dangling apart from the radiator, with no chance of being reconnected without a metal flange being welded back on. Not just any welding job, though. We needed a radiator repairman.

So we inquired at the store and found out that the man next door had the equipment and ran a small business repairing radiators. Incredible coincidence!

So the mission team spent the entire evening waiting while he fixed the radiator. The evening trip to the coastal village was going to have to happen another day. We couldn't get there by dark and we would have to return back to the mission house. Everyone groaned ... but what else could we do? The door was shut. Not delayed. Shut.

The next day we discovered that there were problems at the coast where we were to have been that evening. Some banditos had accosted some people and beat them up in order to rob them. We all looked at each other and thanked God for the "shut door."

Throughout my life I have witnessed the mighty hand of God open doors but the most wonderful work of God has been in shutting doors. When the door is slightly open, I often think that I should just push real hard on it. Sometimes I'm right and sometimes I'm wrong. But a positively "shut door" is a mighty blessing. There is no doubt that God doesn't want me to go through.

For me, the greatest "shut door" came when I was "let go" from a church I was pastoring in Tampa, Florida. That day I cried, but every day since then I have shouted thanks to God. If that door hadn't shut, Missionary Ventures may not have opened.

So it is with the Lord's guidance. Sometimes there are "shut doors." Usually they are so important that they leave no doubt about God's will. And if so, then it must be important for your future!

One of my favorite texts is when the Apostle Paul encountered the "shut door" trying to go north (today it would be from Turkey to Russia). Instead, God pointed Paul west. As a result of this "shut door" the gospel went west into Europe and then ... to America. This small "shut door" changed the course of history. And so it has been for me ... God's "shut doors" are His most significant blessings!

GOD'S "SHUT DOORS"
ARE HIS MOST
SIGNIFICANT BLESSINGS!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Some of the most wonderful things will happen in your life as a result of a "shut door."

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, are you shutting this door? If you are please show me where the open door is that I might follow your plan for my life.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Acts 16:6-10

DELAYS



ur small Piper was losing an engine as we landed in Cape Haitien, Haiti. Thank the Lord; we were able to land safely.

Our one-day stop turned into several days. We were stuck on the northern shore of Haiti trying to get it fixed for several days. We prayed and prayed. Our schedule was ruined. Some of the team had to try to hop flights to get home. I was pretty upset at God.

It was only the last day that I discovered why we were delayed there. We met some really desperate missionaries who needed encouragement and help. It turned out to be one of God's delay.

On another occasion we were faced with financial delays. The walls of the new hospital in Nebaj, Guatemala were up and we were ready to buy and build the roof. But the account was empty. Nothing. Zero. What do we do now? We tried to raise the funds but to no avail. It seemed that during that particular week we came up empty on every call.

The following week, however, Dr. Henry Dumas and Tal Owen were in Guatemala with a medical team. Stopping in San Lucas for dinner one evening they happened to notice another "Gringo" sitting nearby. Within a few moments they exchanged greetings and came to realize that all three of them were from Alabama. Amazing coincidence!

They instantly stuck up a friendship as all three spoke the same language (Alabamese) and knew many of the same towns, universities, football ... etc.

Pretty soon it came up why Henry and Tal were there and they excitedly told him about the new hospital in Nebaj. Their new friend asked them if they needed any lumber ... "Lumber!" they shouted ... and told him about their need for the trusses and roofing materials they were praying about. The gentleman from Alabama explained that he was there to "shut down" a lumber mill he had invested in and offered to send them the timber they needed if we paid the fuel bill for the truck.

The lumber mill cut and shipped the exact amount needed for the 7,000 square foot hospital. When we went to pay the fuel bill, we were told to “forget it!”

Interesting enough, when the next stage of development was ready, the funding was also ready! Why the delay? God had other plans that would involve other people.

Someone once told me that the best way to make God laugh was to tell him OUR plans.

Delays can be stressful in our culture.

It’s not uncommon for other cultures to wait a week to catch a bus. It’s uncomfortable in our culture to wait for anything. In God’s culture there may be delays because He has a better plan. So get used to them or fret!

... THE BEST WAY TO
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THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Whose culture do you live in? Yours or God’s! Whose time are you on? Is God on our time or are we on His time? He is never late but always on time. And God’s timetable is rarely disclosed in detail. We can only look back and proclaim: “Look what God did!”

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to relax and rest in your timetables, for myself, my family, my church, my future, for - (you fill in the blank)_____.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.” Proverbs 16:9

OPEN DOORS

Nancy and I were barely making it. The church we were pastoring was paying us \$157 a week and providing a parsonage. We loved the congregation and the church was growing but this was all they could afford. So when a Christian businessman slipped a \$50 bill in my pocket that afternoon I was so excited. I couldn't wait to get home to share the good news with the family.

On the way home, though, I happened to stop at the corner vegetable and fruit stand. An elderly man and women watched over it. I had often bought apples and oranges from them. They lived in an old pickup truck hidden behind the trees.

That day I stopped and bought a few things. Just then, the Lord spoke to my heart and told me to give them the \$50 bill and share a witness. I argued with the Lord, though. And left with my money still tucked away.

The next day I passed the same place and noticed that the vegetable stand was missing. Troubled, I asked some of the locals what had happened to them. "The old man died ..." came the answer.

To this day I weep when I think about this disobedience and lost opportunity. I am so ashamed.

A few days later Keith Lindley called from Guatemala about a special invitation to go to Nicaragua for a few days. It was during the height of the Civil War and I wasn't too crazy about this adventure so I hesitated. But it was hard to ignore another opportunity.

Keith explained that he was told that there were tremendous needs because of the war and that the pastors were desperate for help. He asked me to pray about it. I did and we went together.

I shall never forget the sight of seeing Russian military equipment and vehicles all over the place; very few other vehicles were running. In fact, there were carcasses of cars cannibalized for parts scattered on the side of the streets. There was little food available and each day our hosts had to scavenge to find something

to feed us.

During our visit I met and spoke with many of the pastors and heard terrible stories of persecution, poverty and abuse. We had brought a little money and clothing and disbursed all we had. The pastors and families wept as they embraced us in thanks. Our hearts were deeply touched.

Within a few months we returned with more clothing, aid and support. Mission teams followed to help build homes, churches, schools, feeding centers and clinics.

Now when I return to Nicaragua we still stay with Asdrubal and Marta Ibarra, the very hosts that invited us there twenty years ago. We laugh and cry reminiscing about the “old” days and how much they meant to each of us. There is a bond there that is difficult to explain. We were in the war together!

To this day I can't tell you why we went. There wasn't a “burning bush” yelling at us to go. There wasn't a dream

or a vision, there wasn't a sermon or an altar call. There wasn't a burden or a heart pounding to do something. There was simply an invitation ... to come. That's all, just an open door.

Throughout my walk with the Lord I've often wondered why so few do significant things for God. What is the determining factor for those who achieve great things for God? It's not a matter of talent, brains or good looks. It's not a matter of riches or education. It's not a matter of heritage or family ties. One main ingredient is that they go through doors that opened to them. We don't know what's on the other side but we sense that the door is open for a short time and we must go through. The window of opportunity in God's service isn't always open. It opens and shuts like a portal in

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time. We can stay seated or we can get up and go.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: A window of opportunity can open the door to eternity for someone.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, give me the “get up and go” spirit. Give me the eyes to see the windows of opportunity in your service and the willingness to take the chance.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:10

STARVING PEOPLE



ne of the most difficult experiences for me to handle is being among starving people.

Our mission team just happened to land at the Agua Viva Children's Home in Mixco, Guatemala at the exact time that a mother brought her two children into the orphanage. Her daughter, Maria, was a little over two years old. She had "wet malnutrition." She was bloated, as her body was unable to handle water because of the lack of protein in her system.

Her son, Jose, was just under two years old. He weighed less than nine pounds, had a wisp of hair and looked like he was a hundred years old – shriveled and skin and bone. He would have died within a few days without the care of this ministry (and some of our team members that stayed behind to help).

When Jose was passed around the group, everyone was weeping. The team held and embraced the mother as she cried. Can you imagine not being able to feed your children? When our kids got sick, we would track down their pediatrician pronto and make sure they didn't have anything "serious." I can't imagine the pain and suffering of watching my child starve to death.

Every day we receive calls and solicitations from around the globe to ease the crises of starvation. Today I got e-mail from our missionaries in India who are working with many of the refugees from the war in Afghanistan. Five hundred people are starving to death can we help?

The problem is difficult. Not just because of the lack of funding and the frustration of limited resources, but because we live in a land of plenty. In the morning, I can be with starving and dying children in Nicaragua (we run a special Re-Nutrition Center for children dying of starvation in Matagalpa, Nicaragua) and that afternoon be at an "All You Can Eat" buffet here in the U.S.

It's difficult to watch ample bodies swarming these buffet troughs. It's painful to hear of the billions of dollars spent every year on dieting, weight loss and "waist management" programs here in North America. The biggest guilt factor is that I, myself, love to

eat and spend more in one day on food than these people make in a month.

Maybe it's my own guilt and frustration that challenged me to change my perspective. What I'm talking about is a change of "heart" and "stomach." What would happen if we all cut our food intake in half and sent the rest to starving people? That's difficult because of how food is packaged and bought here in North America. It's all done in "bulk." You can't buy one or two of anything. Quantity is the mode of acquisition here.

The answer has to be macro and micro. At a macro level we need to hold our governments accountable for waste and graft.

There is enough food produced in the world to go around. On a micro level we can sponsor a child, a

SACRIFICE A LITTLE FOR
A LITTLE ONE.

feeding center, an orphanage or school. Sacrifice a little for a little one. Maybe it won't make you lose weight but it will sure put some weight on one of our little friends. They will be grateful and so will their parents, like Maria's.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The best weight-loss program has always been personal discipline and sacrifice. The best waste management program is the same.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, if you give me a chance to make a difference in a major way to help starving people I'll do whatever I can. But in the mean time, use what I can do to bless as many starving people as possible.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor" Proverbs 22:9

MORE ANSWERED PRAYERS (PART I)

By the time I'd reached Saigon my body was aching from the long hours of confinement. It was screaming for a hot shower and a long sleep. So after our guests had fed us I began to inquire about the evening's activities. It's my way of calculating how long before bedtime.

However, after our noodles and rice, I was ushered into a room full of young adults. They asked me to share a few words. Now you know I was tired so maybe I could only share for a few minutes. Afterwards, I asked again about the hotel accommodations.

Before my host could respond a flurry of hands went up in the air. One by one they began asking me questions ... about theology, the Bible, even doctrine. I was impressed with their questions and answered the best I could. More than four hours passed I couldn't stand up any more. So, as politely as possible, I told my interpreter that I must go to bed. My host apologized profusely and took me to my hotel ... where I slept long and hard.

The next morning our host came back to collect us and overwhelmed me with words of apology for the previous evening. They were so embarrassed and troubled. I tried to calm their anxiety but they were so distressed. Finally one of them broke down and said that she was up all night crying and weeping before the Lord over it.

Again and again I tried to calm their troubled hearts. Finally I asked why it was distressing for them as it was nothing to me. One of them blurted out something I shall never forget. Through my interpreter they told me that they never get teachers and that they felt so badly taking advantage of my time like that.

Later, I came to understand that many of my listeners didn't have a Bible. Some of them only had read a few pages of the Scriptures ... let alone ever been taught about God, the Bible, the truths of God, etc.

To say the least, that next night I lay awake all night long. It was my turn to weep before God. I felt so bad. So that night and on

through the rest of my trip I prayed and meditated over this.

My first appointment when I returned back to the U.S. was to ask a new staff member to take on the job of developing an underground Bible school in Vietnam. He took the job; we raised the funds, and the

school started within six months of my short visit. We could see the hand of God all over

WE PRAYED AND GOD
MADE IT HAPPEN.

this. It was truly an answer to our prayers and theirs.

The school still exists today and so I'm not at liberty to mention names or places. Maybe that's best though. I prefer it when God gets all the credit. We blunder through and God makes it all happen. Anyone who has achieved anything with God will tell you the same thing. We prayed and God made it happen.

This you can copy. All other advice comes after this truth.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: It is out of our biggest mistakes that God can produce the biggest achievements. It is out our grandest failures that God can make the greatest success story. It is out of our humblest prayer that God can receive the most glory.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to channel my life first through you. May your hands sift through all things great and small before I get to them or they get to me.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

MORE ANSWERED PRAYERS (PART II)

It was after one of these trips to Vietnam that one of the teachers came to me with an incredible story.

Apparently they had been holding some of the classes in the hotel where we stayed in the heart of Saigon. It was a cheap place with only a few rooms.

Just before one of the classes the washerwoman from their floor asked what they were doing. They thought she was a spy so they didn't say much; but she persisted and one of the students mentioned that they were studying the Bible. The washerwoman's eyes lit up and she asked if she could join them. Reluctantly they brought her into the room and through a series of events, she came to hear about Jesus for the first time and asked if she could become a Christian.

The team left the following morning but returned one week later. One of them tracked down the washerwoman to find out what happened.

Apparently, the woman had given her heart to the Lord and found a joy she had never know. In her exuberance she went home to tell her family. She was an older single woman who still lived with her parents. She explained that they became quite abusive and tried to punish her. That entire week they did everything they could to get her to recant. But she testified that she had found the Lord and wasn't going to lose Him.

After one week, her parents sat her down and told her that they had decided that it was okay for her to be a Christian ... because her "real" parents had been Christians.

Yes, that morning she found out that her real parents had been killed in an automobile accident and had been good friends with her adopted parents. They had raised her as their own but never told her either of these secrets. Also, her real parents, being Christians, had dedicated her to Christ as a baby, and so they figured it was okay for her to follow in the footsteps of her real family.

Can you imagine this young Christian couple dedicating their newborn as you and I have done? They lifted the child to the Lord and asked His blessing. Forty plus years later, the Lord answered their prayer by sending us to stay on the hotel floor where she was the maid ... where the Bible was being taught ... and then she becomes a Christian.

I believe that God hears every prayer no matter how small and that not one of them is forgotten or dropped, and that it is part of His amazing glory and grace that puts circumstances together so that these prayers are answered.

GOD IS SO SMART THAT
HE CAN MAKE PLANS
FOR BILLIONS OF PEOPLE
INCORPORATING OUR
PRAYERS.

How many prayers have you uttered? God knows them all and not one of them is forgotten. Within His time, circumstances and providence they will become a part of His plan. You see, God is so smart that He can make plans for billions of people incorporating our prayers. He plays chess with sixteen trillion pieces and can still win the game! And He can give all the human pieces their own will ... and still wins every time!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: We can't imagine how God knows everything and how wise He is in handling every prayer. We can, however, rest in it.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, You work out Your will, my desires Your purposes, my plans, Your steps ... and still win. We are more than winners. Help me to stop thinking as a whiner and start thinking as a winner ... and start resting in you.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." Matthew 6:7

GROWING UP IN THE LORD

When our family moved to Orlando, Florida twenty years ago we decided to join Pine Castle Church. We knew Pastor Bill Pickett and his ministry in Tampa (where we lived previously) and we became a part of the family of God there.

One of the first things that we did was become involved in the missions program and Bill even highlighted the ministry and sponsored several mission trips each year. All was going great until he asked me to join one of the Bible study groups. The one he chose for me wasn't a good fit at all. Everyone was at least twice my age and I wasn't getting anything out of it. I went out of obedience but had a bad attitude. I just wasn't being "fed" and wanted to leave. I didn't realize that God had a plan for me with this Bible Study Group and a plan for the group. He chose to work through my spiritual overseer to implement it His plan.

Aren't all Christians "priests" though and shouldn't I hear directly from God? Why does God do this? I personally agonized over being with this group for two or three years. It was nice but not fulfilling ... until Dr. Lilly joined the study. Howard "Jack" Lilly, Jr. was a local orthodontist. He was an alcoholic and had just been incarcerated for "driving under the influence."

Dr. Lilly came to the Bible Study with many questions and we started to have some lively discussions. Things got interesting. Then one day I asked Jack if he would pray about going to Guatemala with me some day to work on the teeth of some impoverished children I knew there. To my amazement, he agreed. The trip changed his life. Daphner, Jack's wife, and he began to lead teams, recruiting from many of his old friends. Many of whom found missions and Christ during the same week.

These Dental Mission Teams became the focus of their lives and it wasn't long before Jack joined our Board of Directors as a platform for raising funds and organizing more teams.

When Daphner died, her children mentioned at her memorial service how much missions meant to her. When Jack died, it was

paramount in the topic of his memorial how much he was used by God to set up the Dental Missions program for Missionary Ventures that would affect so many people around the globe.

Amazing, how God works. Number one is the interesting truth that God will use the most “unlikely” people to accomplish His work around the globe. To this day people mention two things about Jack’s life: “Wasn’t he a drunk?” and “How God changed his life and used him in missions!”

GOD WILL USE THE MOST
“UNLIKELY” PEOPLE TO
ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK
AROUND THE GLOBE.

Number two is the fact that it would not have happened if I had “bucked” Pastor Bill and gone “where I would be fed.”

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: By the time we are three years old we are taught to feed ourselves. By the time we are three years’ old in the Lord we should be able to feed ourselves too! We should be able to submit to our spiritual authorities because God works through them to help guide us.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, forgive my lack of spiritual growth and continue to work on me through my pastor and the others that you have placed over me.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

GOD'S TIMING

Just when I think I understand the Lord and have Him figured out He surprises me again. It's very difficult to put God in a "box" and say this is who He is and this is how He works.

When I answered the phone call from John Ogden, Chairman of the Board for the Christian Motorcyclists Association, I was expecting to talk about the upcoming National Rally. To my surprise John sounded somber and explained that Roy Johnson had just passed away.

The next day I hopped a couple of flights to be in Leveland, Texas to comfort Roy's family and to honor a great man of God. Roy was one of the foundational "pillars" in the establishment of the Christian Motorcyclists Association. Twenty-five years ago it was just Roy, Herb Shreve, Tom Pitman and a handful of other Christian motorcyclists who had a heart to reach out to the gangs and clubs who rode motorcycles.

The vision grew and grew, adding more and more members. The organization today has over 100,000 members in the USA and chapters in most major cities. CMA has been duplicated in 11 other countries and through their yearly "Run for the Son" campaign has raised millions of dollars to send Bibles (through Open Doors), the "Jesus Film" (Through the Jesus Film Project of Campus Crusade) and motorcycles for indigenous pastors (through Missionary Ventures).

It has been a ministry that has touched the lives of millions of people worldwide. And it is without a doubt that Roy Johnson's faithfulness, steadiness and wise counsel on the board of directors was a major reason for it. He was a simple cotton farmer who rode a motorcycle and began using it to win souls and work with CMA.

The morning of the funeral, I was praying about this "sudden" death and lamenting to the Lord about His poor timing. I missed Roy and was confused.

As I drove to the church I noticed that I had forgotten to change my clock to Texas time and had another hour before the service. So

I stopped at a local fast food place for a cup of coffee. As I walked to the front door, a filthy street person grinned at me with three brown teeth. He wore about 5 jackets (it was warm out, too) and had obviously slept on more sidewalks than beds. “Just need a smoke before breakfast, he muttered to me.” I passed by, hoping to ignore him.

GOD’S TIMING IS HIS
TIMING. PEACE IS BEING IN
SYNC WITH IT.

But as I drank my coffee, the guy came into the restaurant and stared right at me. I looked down at my newspaper hoping to ignore him again. It didn’t work. He walked up to me and asked: “You are a preacher, aren’t you?” I nodded “yes” and turned ... hoping to ignore him again. But he sat down across from me.

“How do you know I’m a preacher?” I asked.

“You look like one.”

“My name is Steve.” I held out my hand.

“My name is Rueben.” Now we were friends.

I smiled and asked what I could do for him. He showed me his self-inflicted tattoos that he made with his knife and pen. One read: “God is mine.” And he explained that he knew God and that God knew him. His three brown teeth appeared out as he grinned.

“But many people don’t think I know God,” he dared. “But I do, and He knows me.”

I was nodding my approval. I didn’t want to get into an argument.

He then proceeded to tell me about his life, his childhood, his time in the Army, the accident that left him with half his mind ... Then he stopped and looked me right in the eyes and asked me this:

“What do you think, preacher, is the reason why God hasn’t taken me to heaven yet?”

Immediately these words jumped out of my mouth: “Because He isn’t finished with you yet.”

That big toothy grin shot out again. “Yes, I believe so, too.”

With that, he stood up and walked out of the restaurant. I

never saw Rueben again.

During the funeral I grieved with the rest of Roy's friends and family ... and thought about Rueben, too.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: God's timing is His timing. Peace is being in sync with it.

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to understand the Time; my time, my years, my months, my days, my hours, my minutes that they might all be yours.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning." Daniel 2:21

MEN ARE LIKE WILDEBEESTS ... WOMEN ARE LIKE LIONESSES!

Have you ever watched a wilderness documentary on the hunting skills and practices of lions in Africa? You might have seen the scene where the herd of wildebeests dashes by the lioness pack waiting in the bush. All of a sudden one of the lionesses leaps out of the brush onto a straggler. She firmly embeds her teeth into the wildebeest's backbone while the others jump aboard to take their dinner to the ground. Amazingly, the rest of the wildebeests stop within fifty feet to watch their "brother" toss and flop around as the lionesses begin to tear into the meat. You wonder what is going through their minds? I believe it is something like: "I'm just glad it's not me!"

The great lion patriarch of the pride then strolls up to the kill and takes the best and biggest portions. The scene usually ends with all the lionesses lying on their backs, napping in the afternoon sun ... blood still being licked from their huge jowls. The dumb wildebeests are standing nearby trying to pretend they didn't notice ... as if nothing happened.

Ever notice a man being scolded by his wife or girlfriend in public? He is trying to calm her down but she doesn't care who hears. Because soon other women will join her in the "kill." The rest of the men are thinking: "I'm just glad it's not me!"

Women work together. They will protect each other. They will join forces for common causes and, as long as the authority chain is understood, will fight for each other till the death. The strongest "Union" in the world is, quite honestly, the union of women. Every father, husband, pastor and leader of any cause knows this and will, if he or she is wise, work with them.

My daughter's favorite means of exhortation has been: "I'm going to tell mom!" My wife even uses it when she needs reinforcements: "I'm going to call your mother."

Now my son never says: "I'm going to tell Dad." Because he

knows Dad will say: "You are on your own, son." And I'd never try to unite the men in my family for anything but a fishing or golf outing. They won't stick under pressure!

I've watched women in hundreds of cultures worship and sing. They will sing in harmony, swing their arms in sync with each other and worship as one. I've watched men in these same environments all doing "their own thing."

None of them even care what their "brother" is doing. Men are by nature, competitive. Women are by nature community minded.

Women will go everywhere (even to the restroom) in packs. Men will only go alone and be embarrassed with the thought that they might need someone else ... least of all another man. That's why men don't ask for directions. That's why men would rather drive aimlessly lost for hours (at top speeds as it might make up for being lost) and refuse to ask for help.

Perhaps this is why there is so little unity amongst men in ministry, church and missions. I don't just think so ... I know so.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
IF CHRISTIAN LEADERS
IN YOUR TOWN WORKED
TOGETHER TO WIN YOUR
"VILLAGE" FOR CHRIST?

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: What would happen if Christian leaders in your town worked together to win your "village" for Christ?

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to subdue my carnal nature, discipline my flesh, control my thoughts of independence and link up with other men to win the world for Jesus.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "My prayer is ... that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 16:20-23

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR CHURCH OWE?

(NOT TO JESUS ... BUT TO THE BANK)

I'm a church builder," bragged the pastor. "Everywhere I go I leave behind a beautiful new church building that will carry them into the future ..." He proudly paraded me from the auditorium to the Sunday school wing to the fellowship hall.

Later that day I was talking to some of the members and came to understand that this new building cost them over two million dollars. They thought that it would bring in new people. Instead it was crushing them with a financial obligation to the bank. They were basically paralyzed ... they could do nothing but pour everything they could give into paying the interest every month. They apologized for not doing anything in missions ... as they shook my hand and said goodbye.

A few months later I learned that the pastor had moved on to another church and that he was already gearing them up for a building program.

Less than two percent of all churches in the U.S. give to missions. I think I know why? It's not that they don't want to win the world for Jesus, it's because they have to make payments to the bank for their building. For some reason the church "building" has become the most important purpose of our church's mission.

Here's another interesting observation. I've fished as much as I can throughout my life. And I've fished in many countries throughout the globe. It's a great hobby. It helps to keep my sanity.

And you know something? I've never once seen a fish jump into my basket or my boat. I've never once watched as a fish leapt into my fish net ... much less my stringer! I've had to "GO" to the lake, river, or ocean and CATCH them. Once caught, they are placed into the basket ... usually an old bucket.

Here's an interesting observation too. Never have I seen a fish basket decorated, carpeted, or embossed with gold and silver. And

no real fisherman proudly holds up this bucket and says: “That’s a great looking bucket.”

No, they will hold up a stringer of fish and proudly have their picture taken. They will hold up an old bucket full of FISH and brag about it for years to come. But no real fisherman spends time, money and thought on the basket. They are all concerned about one thing and one thing only; that is the FISH. How many and the size. Anything else is foolish.

IS GOD SO WEAK THAT
HE NEEDS BANKS TO
PROVIDE FOR HIS WILL?

And here’s another interesting question: How is it that we can preach on faith and believe God for so much and then run to the bank for a loan? Is God so weak that He needs banks to provide for His will? Isn’t God powerful enough to pay for his things in ADVANCE? Or is your god poor like us and must pay for things on time!

One more note: I heard this same pastor who spent over forty years running from church to church building huge monuments and engulfing the congregations with heavy indebtedness is now a financial planner. He can’t practice though because he’s under investigation for misappropriating funds! Interesting.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: What true fisherman spends 99% of his time, resources and talent on the basket and not on “catching fish.”

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to catch men for Jesus. Help me to hone my skills; perfect the art of winning the lost to Jesus that my basket would be overflowing.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’” Matthew 4:19

THE NAME OF JESUS IS ENOUGH

Traveling through Southern India, we came upon a small village that was converted to Christianity. All in this tribal community had been baptized and changed their Hindu names to Christian ones. Now everyone they met knew who they were and what they stood for, very easy in the East where you can tell everyone's faith by their name, but not in the West.

So I was amazed and asked how it came to pass that the entire tribe had come to Jesus. My interpreter spoke with the chief for several minutes and came back with the following report:

A few years ago the chief's son was very ill, to the point of dying. In the chief's desperation, he prayed to every god he knew and had ever heard of. He sacrificed every animal and possession he had hoping to cure his son. He traveled to meet every witch doctor and every "healer" he could contact. All efforts failed. His son lay in a state of unconsciousness and at the edge of death's door.

As the chief was walking along the road he heard the name of a "new" god whose name was "Jesus." But no one around could tell him anything about this "new god." So in his desperation, he returned to his village and entered his home, knelt over his son, and said the name of "Jesus" into his son's ear.

To his amazement, his son immediately woke up, his eyes fixed on his father's. From that point on his son recovered. When the chief saw his son fully recovered, he decided to investigate who this "Jesus" was. Within a few months he learned about the gospel and began to study the Bible. He brought his family to Jesus and the entire community (as everyone had heard of this miracle) came to Christ.

I have often wondered how much faith was necessary to activate the power of God. I've also wondered how "holy" and pure I needed to be for God to work through me. Both of these are important, but I've also discovered that "Jesus is enough."

When I was a little five-year-old boy, I snuck out of the house

and walked two blocks to a nearby ice-cream shop. Climbing up on the stool I ordered a chocolate sundae. When the waitress came with it, she asked for thirty-five cents. "Thirty-five cents?" I asked. "What's that?" The man next to me howled with laughter and threw the money on the counter.

GOD IS MORE THAN
SUFFICIENT ON HIS
OWN ...

Back then; I didn't understand how money worked. To be honest with you, I don't know how "faith" works all the time but this I do know ... Jesus paid for it. And He is enough.

In other words, when my faith is low and I feel I'm the worst sinner, failure, and loser (yep I feel that way some times too), I come back to the fact that God isn't dependent upon either my performance or my personal holiness to get His work done. God is more than sufficient on His own and it is His great and wonderful gift that He should use us at all.

It is His grace that makes things happen. It's not my grace. It is His power that changes lives. It's not my power. It's His wisdom that gets things done. I've only stumbled upon His activity and chosen to join Him!

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Maybe the question is not how much faith we have but whom our faith is in? Whom is your faith fixed? Is your faith in "Your Faith?" Or is your faith fixed on the Lord, Jesus. If it's on Jesus, than He is enough!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help my unbelief. Turn my fear into faith by sensitizing me to your presence. In you presence I'll find solace, security, and your supply.

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

A GLIMPSE INTO ETERNITY

I don't know why, but for some reason I've spent a lot of time in airports waiting for my hosts to come and collect me. I guess my reputation as a "Fund Raiser" precedes me. People aren't excited about picking me up!

Seriously, I have waited in airports for hours and even days. In our culture, being "on time" means within a few minutes. In some countries it means meeting that same day. Once we landed and waited six hours for the bus driver to pick us up. When I asked him why he was late, he thought for a moment and replied: "It's Monday isn't it?"

They say that we Americans have clocks and watches all over the place, but never have any time. People in developing countries don't have any timepieces and have all the time in the world. Strange but true!

On one particular visit, I had flown for twenty hours, ridden buses and trains, landing at a particular station where I was to telephone my hosts to come pick me up. It took about an hour to figure out the phones, the cards and the numbers and so it was wonderful to hear a friend's voice and know that it would be just an hour before they would be there to collect me.

I was to wait in front of automatic doors by the bookstore. This wasn't a wise choice because every time the doors opened in this busy train station, ice-cold air rushed in, plastering me with frigid snow. So I stood there freezing and waiting. An hour passed, then two hours, then three hours ... four hours later my hosts showed up. It's hard to arrive with much joy when there is no one there to welcome you.

I had gone through a series of these experiences when I found myself waiting in a remote airport in South America. My hosts were confused about the dates, so I ended up waiting several hours. As I was standing and waiting, AGAIN, I looked up and complained to God. Just then, I happened to observe a large number of elementary-age girls coming off the plane, grabbing their luggage and triumphantly parading through the airport with their trophies. "Must be returning home after winning some kind of sports

activity.” I thought.

They collected their luggage and headed toward the automatic doors. As the doors opened and closed, I could catch a glimpse of their friends and family waiting on the outside. They were holding up banners that welcomed them home. As each girl bounced through the door, they were hugged and passed around to welcoming arms, tears and screams.

Then the doors would shut. It was silent again until another girl passed through. And so it went, one after the other. Shouts and screams from their loved ones filled the airport for small moments. Then the doors would shut again. Silence. They were on the other side.

On and on, people went through the doors to their triumphant welcome ... I watched them all pass by. As the last one slipped through to the other side, I could hear the Lord say: “That’s the way it will be for you when you come home!”

I have never minded waiting since. One day, there will be a welcome home party.

THE ONLY THINGS THAT
WE CAN KEEP THROUGH
ETERNITY ARE THOSE
THINGS THAT WE HAVE
SENT ON AHEAD OF US...

THOUGHT FOR TODAY: The only things that we can keep through eternity are those things that we have sent on ahead of us ... people who have joined the Family of God. They will welcome us home!

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on those things above. Sometimes it’s hard because our sight is limited. So every now and then please give us a glimpse of eternity.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:2

If you would like more information on how to get involved, check off the appropriate boxes and mail to:

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