



FAITH

THE LINK WITH
GOD'S POWER

REINHARD
BONNKE

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WHITAKER
HOUSE

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PREFACE

This book comes to you with a fresh angle on the subject of *faith*. It offers profound insights into faith's trials and triumphs, and it highlights God's character and His Word.

Here is just one brief example of how Scripture illustrates the relationship between faith and feelings:

When danger looms large, fear is inevitable. When our body chemistry senses impending disaster, when we suffer heavy blows and our circumstances are oppressive and dark, or when pain and illness sit with us at the fireside, fear and alarm become our natural response. What, then, does faith do? It removes the shackles from our ankles; we challenge the paralyzing grip and move forward anyway. With God, fear will not stop us; we overcome it.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.
(Psalm 42:5)*

Blessings will unfold with each chapter, the focus being firmly set on Jesus Christ, "*the author and finisher of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2).

It is my desire that this book will teach the never-changing faith principles revealed in the Word of God. They have been proven throughout my fifty-plus years of following Jesus, against the backdrop of decades of frontline evangelism around the world. These same principles have been tried and tested by my colleague, the Reverend George Canty, from the United Kingdom. His scholarly collaboration with me as I prepared the manuscript is something for which I am deeply grateful.

—Reinhard Bonnke
December 2002

PART 1

FAITH, FROM MINUS TO PLUS

The Bible was written for people with no real faith. Thus, we all begin with a minus, in terms of faith. If we have no faith, reading the Bible will produce it; if we have some faith, reading the Bible will produce more. We do not first acquire the faith that we bring to Scripture. Scripture encourages faith. “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17).

Many who do not believe in God do not read the Bible. They are sick and leave the medicine in the bottle, tightly corked. People without faith should be warned that if they open the Bible, they are likely to end up as believers.

The Bible brings us to the cross. People do not start moving mountains until they have been to Calvary. They could not even move a molehill, let alone a mole. Real faith does not start at the university. We will have less if we go there without any! If we have not been to where Christ saves, not even a doctorate in theology will be able to help us.

The starting pistol is fired at the hill of Calvary, far outside the city wall. From there, we “*press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14).

Walking in doubt is like being stuck in a thick fog. We need radar in order to function, which faith provides in this world of uncertainty. “*The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’*” (Romans 1:17). Believe God! It is life’s greatest adventure.

Chapter by chapter, I want to offer as much knowledge and experience on the subject of faith as I can. Whether you have traveled far along the faith’s road, you’re just beginning, or you haven’t even started yet, I want to come alongside you and share the treasures I have collected over a lifetime.

The “Plus Life”

One morning, Jesus walked along the glistening shore of Lake Galilee and beckoned to a few local fishermen. He said, “*Follow me*” (Matthew 4:19). In that moment, everything began for those fishermen. Before, life had only been about fish; now, life became about people, action, and changing world history with ever-increasing faith, ever-increasing affect.

Jesus did not call them—or you and me—to ditch their smiles and to wear sackcloth. His mission was not to turn people into “stick-in-the-muds.” Jesus Himself was not very conventional! The disciples caught His infectious spirit, one that would challenge the stuffy establishment. He showed them new things, especially faith and love, by which, they would conquer the world.

God the Deliverer

The primary truth about God is that He is the Deliverer, the Emancipator, and the Savior. He is God only to the free. Faith is a venture that turns life into an adventure.

Doubt gets us nowhere. Doubt is the mooring rope keeping us in the harbor. Just as ships are designed to ride the high seas on their way to a foreign port, believing in God means casting off the ties that have kept you in the dock. Faith inspires; doubt paralyzes. Faith says, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). Unbelief does nothing. Faith in God is exciting.

We become what we were born to be only when we are born again by faith in Christ Jesus, who said, “*If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*” (John 8:36). The Bible is the world’s greatest book on freedom. The very idea of freedom came from the Bible, not from Greece or Rome. Read it! Remember, God made the first free nation ever seen on earth: Israel. And He wants to put a sense of liberty in your very soul. God opposes tyranny, and the gospel makes you a free-born son of God.

People often talk of those who hide behind religion. In *religion*, that may be true, but Christianity is summed up in Christ, and you cannot call Christ a *religion*! He is “*the resurrection and the life*” (John 11:25). He said, “*If you abide in My word...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31–32). He is no deceiver. Millions have found themselves gloriously freed through the gospel. His words do not stifle us with rules and commandments, but His yoke is easy and His burden is light. (See Matthew 11:30.) The Sermon on the Mount describes what Christians are naturally—what they want to do, not what they should be like.

Bondage Is Truth Corrupted

Christ warned His followers, over and over again, to beware of false prophets. This is particularly important to those who are just beginning in the Christian life, but it applies the same to all believers. Not all false prophets are found in cults, either, although there are more than five thousand known cults in the U.S. alone. Many are a threat to the concept of liberty.

By their very nature, cults are all about control. “*By their fruits you will know them*” (Matthew 7:20). Once a cult gets its hands on you, it keeps you under its thumb and in complete control of your money, what you do, where you go, what you think, and who your friends are. The aim of a cult is to destroy your self-reliance and breed dependency. Cult leaders are not shepherds. They are wardens and religious policemen.

Some teach the Scriptures but turn them into chains that bind, standing truth on its head, just as the scribes and Pharisees did. They use the gospel of deliverance to bind converts, falsifying the very spirit and purpose of God’s message. Many of their converts are sad souls who lack true faith and accept handcuffs in order to gain a sense of security.

Jesus was not a spiritual policeman. He did not discipline the disciples. That is not what *disciple* means. He never ordered them about, interfered, or dictated their daily affairs. They came and went as they wished. It was all left to their wisdom and discretion.

That is how Christ deals with us. When we give our lives to Jesus, He makes them our own. If we blindly obey a church leader, we are ultimately responsible before God for what we do. No one should appropriate to himself authority over others. Scripture forbids leaders to be “*lords over those entrusted to [them]*” (1 Peter 5:3). Jesus said, “*One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren*” (Matthew 23:8). Truth comes from the Word of God, which sets us free. God is a Deliverer. Laws, like the Sabbath, were made for man, not man for the laws. (See Mark 2:27.)

A Million Candlepower

When the apostle Paul was preaching in Troas, “*there were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together*” (Acts 20:8). The Bible writers have a way of saying that kind of thing and yet conveying a spiritual truth. There were two kinds of light there: the oil lamps and the Christians who filled the room.

To be a believer is to be a source of light. *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:8). Believers are stars; unbelievers are black holes, from which light never escapes. Faith makes us *“children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15).

A Christian needs a church just as a candle needs a flame, a tree needs soil, and a light bulb needs a socket. Without a flame, a candle cannot burn; without soil, a tree cannot grow; without a socket, a light bulb cannot shine. Neither can you. Without fellowship, a Christian can neither stand, nor grow, nor shine.

Jesus does not put you on the shelf. He has a special niche in mind for each one of us in His house. He said, *“You are the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:14)—single lamps, but also many lights, joined together. A single lamp, according to Jesus, was to be placed on a lampstand so *“it gives light to all who are in the house”* (verse 15). One candlepower for one house. But He spoke of many lights together: *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden”* (verse 14). A city does not have one candlepower but a million candlepower. When Christ said, “You are the light of the world,” it was a plural “you.” He brings many lights together, people mingling and joining together, flame with flame.

The *“city set on a hill”* is a church. In Troas, there were many lamps together, because it was a big room. The world is a big place and many lamps are needed. A hymn says, “you in your small corner, and I in mine,” but we face more than a few dark corners; ours is a dark planet. The whole globe needs light. There is no light where there is no faith in God.

Spiritually, the world today is like Genesis 1:2–3: *“Darkness was on the face of the deep....Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.* Today, God is still saying, *“Let there be light.”*

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

After Christ rose from the dead, the disciples began brightening up the world with the light of the gospel. We should do the same. The establishment complained that they had *“filled Jerusalem with [their] doctrine”* (Acts 5:28), and later, it was said, *“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too”* (Acts 17:6). That is exactly what God said He would do. Psalm 146:9 says, *“The way of the wicked He turns upside down.”* The way of unbelief is

upside down, but God turns it the right-side up. That is my job and yours. We are God's agents for putting a topsy-turvy world upright.

Business in Great Waters

When Christ beckoned to His first followers, they were unknown, quietly getting on with their business of fishing on a lake. But He sent them out to “*do business on great waters*” (Psalm 107:23), and “*to the end*” (Acts 1:8). In Scripture, the sea represents nations, the waves roaring and turbulent. Christ once stilled the storm on the waters. Now He sends us to fish in every nation on earth, “*though its waters roar and be troubled*” (Psalm 46:3). The Lord speaks peace to the nations.

Jesus does not call us to sit in church and vegetate, as if in a rest home. We have a job to do, not a hobby, and the biggest job of all is to change the world. It is a joint effort, all of us together with Christ. As He said, “*I will build My church*” (Matthew 16:18).

The Ax

The church is Christ's battle ax. Every ax has a handle and a head with a cutting edge—the handle for leverage, the head for weight, and the sharp edge to do the work. Whether we make the work of God possible by doing the thousands of little jobs that must be done or we give weight to the work by our support or we attack with the cutting edge of evangelism, all these tasks are vitally needed.

I myself, Reinhard Bonnke, lead no church but depend on many churches that give weight to the work I do. My team looks after the endless matters that must be organized, yet we are one in the eyes of the Master.

The Orchestra

I never attempt anything alone. In a symphony, the soloist needs accompaniment, often from an entire orchestra. All the details of our work must be arranged, whether they are campaigns, literature, TV, films, books, or whatever. There are hundreds, often even tens of thousands, of backup players who must be “in tune” with my aims. They do so with their special gifts and abilities, or with their prayers and financial gifts. I, too, must work “in tune” with their aims and purposes. Every melody needs harmony and is perfected and enriched by the qualities of other instruments, vocal talents, and choreography. I never go to any country except when groups of churches ask me to come there. We all must work together.

No man seemed stronger in faith than the apostle Paul. When he heard that Christians had appeared in Rome, he wrote to them and said, *“I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me”* (Romans 1:11–12). Mutual faith. Each of us is like a single sheet of paper that cannot stand on its own edge without falling over. But a ream of paper is a block of five hundred sheets, which is able to stand on edge comfortably together, supporting one another. Every believer needs support. The world will not help our cause. The world is no friend to the friends of Jesus.

The Precious Oils

Speaking of supporting each other, the Bible uses a very striking explanation and illustration for this: oil! We should first understand that oil in Scripture always represents the Holy Spirit. When Scripture talks about oil in lamps, anointing oil, cosmetic oil, or perfumed oil, it is symbolic language for the work of the Holy Spirit.

The idea originates from Psalm 133:1–2: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head.”* This was referring to the ceremonial pouring of perfumed oil on the head of the High Priest of Israel.

Why is unity like oil? It is because oil represents the Holy Spirit, and He brings unity. That is the link, and two verses use the idea. Ephesians 4:3 speaks of *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Unity through the oil of the Spirit poured upon us is like the oil poured on the head in Psalm 133. Then, in verses 12–13, it says, *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry...till we all come to the unity of the faith.”* So faith also comes into it—faith, the Holy Spirit, and unity all play their part.

Notice that Scripture does not say, “Become united; be one!” It says, *“come to the unity of the faith.”* We cannot “come to” something that does not exist; but unity does exist. We only have to maintain it. That unity is the presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer. This fact should be demonstrated. We are one in Him from the moment we believe.

Commitment

Now, nobody can have unity on his or her own. You cannot be married on your own. There is no such thing as an independent believer. You cannot have unity by belonging nowhere. Some say they belong to the universal church but are

committed nowhere in particular. This simply means nobody can rely on these people. Churches cannot be built on floaters.

Every born-again believer is *in Christ*, together with all others. “*There is one body and one Spirit*” (Ephesians 4:4)—the great body of believers in heaven and on earth. Everything in the New Testament points to unity. We are to “*bear one another’s burdens*” (Galatians 6:2), for example. How can we do that if we have nothing to do with other Christians?

The New Testament always assumes that all believers are attached to one another locally. The epistle to the Ephesians is all about the church, and everything it says is directed to the whole church, as well, not just to isolated individuals. It is the whole church, for example, that must “*put on the whole armor of God*” (Ephesians 6:11), for it is a fighting force, an army.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity. He is the bonding element. This bonding is a wonderful effect of faith in Christ. It is creative. It brings about a new kind of oneness not even known in the closest of earthly families.

Many Lights

Next, oil represents light. The great national temple in Jerusalem had a famous golden lampstand. The seven-branched menorah is described in Exodus chapters 25, 35, 37, and 39. The Romans carried it off when they plundered Jerusalem in ad 70, and it is depicted on the Arch of Titus, seen daily by tourists in Rome. The menorah is the badge of modern Israel.

This lampstand, or lamp standard, had neither joint nor weld, being made out a single piece of gold. Each arm had a lamp—a wick—and the oil came from a single source: the central stem. The seven lights shone as one. Jesus talked about oil in lamps, a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

In the book Revelation, the apostle John described Christ standing among seven golden lampstands, each representing a church. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing, representing the seven Spirits of God. (See Revelation 4:5.) The seven flames of each candelabrum cast a single light and had a single fuel source—the Spirit of God. There is one Spirit, as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, manifested in many gifts, ministries, and operations.

If believers shine and bring brightness into the darkened world, it is by the Holy Spirit; otherwise, they are dead wicks. A wick cannot shine without fuel, no matter how hard it tries. Christ sets our hearts aglow so that we can blaze for God. We don’t merely believe. If we believe, we shine.

The world never gets the hang of things. Because of their ignorance of the reality behind Christians, they see Christians only as religious enthusiasts, mere religion pushers, Bible punchers, or religious freaks. This is all the world sees. Unbelievers are like sheep who cannot understand why human beings listen to music. Jesus said the Holy Spirit is not given to the world. That means unbelievers are basically different from us, almost alien, as if they were from Mars.

However, one candle is lit from another candle. The fire, the light of God, is transmitted. That is why we are here. Paul the apostle spent only a few days introducing the gospel to the people of Thessalonica, but later, in a letter to them, Paul congratulated their enthusiasm, saying, *“From you the word of the Lord has sounded forth...in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything”* (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Faith lights the lamps that show the way. Send the light!

We begin perhaps with no faith—a minus. But at the cross, the flame of faith leaps into our hearts, bringing the Holy Spirit, salvation, and forgiveness. At that place, Christ’s infinite work is accomplished, and faith makes it ours. We believe and receive. The Holy Spirit translates all Jesus did for us into our personal experience.

We are the lights of the world. The world likes to think religion is dying, but in vast areas of the world, the death rattle is being heard in the throat of secularism. As Christ is resurrection, godlessness is death. Throughout the world, people are failing to find satisfaction in what mere governments can do, and they are turning to the things of the Holy Spirit.

That is the situation. Have faith, be filled with the Spirit, and burn for God! Let the seven-branched lamp standard be ablaze!

If you believe, and I believe
And we together strive,
The Holy Spirit will come down,
And nations will revive.

FAITH, THE SIXTH SENSE?

Some people have very odd ideas about faith, so odd that here we need to clarify what, in fact, we are discussing when we talk about *faith*. *Faith* is not believing something you know is not true; neither is it believing something for which there is no evidence. That is simply foolishness. The Bible is a big book all about faith, and in it, we find a few facts about *faith* that will help us get the definition straight.

Common Faith

The elementary fact is that faith is a built-in part of all humans. We are born to be believers. If you think you have no faith, try it! Try not believing in anything or anybody—your wife, husband, doctor, bank, boss, baker, or chef. There are no guarantees, yet we put our lives into the hands of surgeons, and we trust drivers of trains, cars, and airplanes without thinking of faith. But that is what it is. Faith is a kind of immune system to filter out fears that otherwise would paralyze all activity. When it fails, we develop all kinds of phobias and compulsions. It is a nervous breakdown. Jesus said to not have phobia but faith. (See Luke 8:50.)

If you stopped using this faculty of faith, you would never get out of bed in the morning or step outside. You might think the sky could fall down. In this world, a million cobra troubles are coiled to strike, but we carry on, usually quite aloof from them and confident. The Bible says, “*God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*” (Romans 12:3). Christ said, “*Only believe*” (Mark 5:36), because we can.

Getting married is the best illustration of faith I know of. Has any bride or bridegroom ever imagined the other was perfect? Yet they commit themselves to each other for life, for better or worse. One bride refused to repeat the words, “I take thee for better or worse.” She said, “I only take him for worse. I know he’ll

never be better.” She still went ahead, confident but not optimistic!

There is no mystique about faith. Perhaps little children are the biggest believers. Many times I have lifted a child in my arms, but not once has the child screamed for fear of falling. Jesus Himself carried a child as an illustrated sermon. He said the child carried a passport to the kingdom of God. Faith does not come by murdering common sense. It is not a peculiar psychology developed with great effort by saints in caves and living on bread and water. It is not peculiar at all. It is natural. Doubt is peculiar—irrational in fact. It is the only thing that ever surprised Jesus.

Sinners Can Believe

The next thing we must understand is what it means to be holy, to be a saint. People often confuse faith and virtue. Virtue is developed. By contrast, faith does not come in the same way that one learns the piano, grade by grade. People talk about “big believers” as if believing came in sizes, like suit jackets. But we can have faith even when we know we are not very good. Sinners can have faith; otherwise, they could never be saved. Nobody is good, but Christ taught us that all can believe. He commended some people for their faith, but they were foreigners, quite ignorant of doctrine.

The Bible does the same. It has an honor roll listing heroes and heroines of faith. (See Hebrews 11.) They are remembered not for valor or kindness but for their complete reliance upon God. Faith is a perfectly ordinary thing that makes us outstanding in the eyes of God, since “*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*” (Hebrews 11:6). By faith it is possible to please God, and faith is possible for everybody.

Believe in What?

Another fact about faith is that we are what we believe. Thus, we need to monitor what we believe. We make the decision to believe, and what we believe, in turn, will define us. Some believe in UFOs, or that the earth is alive, or in voices from the dead; perhaps they just want to be different. In our lives, we are presented with millions of things we could believe in, but God is supreme. Above all else, He is the one worth believing in.

Even in this modern world, surveys show that practically everybody believes in God—in some sort of God, somewhere. The question is, *what sort?*

Faith, the Character Test

In this way, believing tests us. The kind of God we believe in is a window into our souls—for example, the difference between believing in Christ or Karl Marx. We are what we believe. What does it say about us if we follow a faith that only demands a few prayers? Minimum-effort religions can be quite popular; they make small demands and gain a big following, cheap faith for lackadaisical people.

Jesus Christ asks for everything: “Son, give Me your heart.” A broad religion is an easy road, but it gets narrower and goes nowhere. Faith in Christ is a narrow road that gets wider and leads somewhere. *“The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day”* (Proverbs 4:18).

Faith Pins Hopes

Another fact about faith is that it needs to be matched with action. Belief is not just brain cells in motion. It demands a response. Do we do what we believe? If we believe in a seed, we plant it. A man who owns an airplane but will not risk a trip is a contradictory character. It will get him exactly nowhere. We may as well believe in Mickey Mouse as the Almighty if we do not expect Him to do anything.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, an upright and forthright character, in his short book made some hard-hitting remarks. *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble”* (James 2:19). Their theology was sound but useless; they were sham believers. James said they were lovers of money who were impatient with God, and using them as an example, he said faith that does not work is not faith.

Everyone knows humanity first stepped onto the moon on July 20, 1969. It was a great event, but it happened a long way from planet earth. Most wives find it more useful to know their husbands, who live in the same house. That is proper faith. It is also the kind of faith God wants. He is not a figure of past history but *“a very present help”* (Psalm 46:1).

Faith, Not Scientific Opinion

People often say, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” No they will not. They cannot. You can only believe, or have faith, in what you do not see. What you see is fact, and is not up for believing. If you can prove it, faith does not come into play. Nobody believes two plus two equals four. They know so.

But God wants faith. *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”*

(John 20:29). Faith is the way to get God's blessing, not the "cleverness" that says you won't believe anything unless you can run your tape measure round it.

This was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians. He was familiar with the great thinkers of Greece who had discovered the certainties of mathematics. Reason worked with numbers, and they imagined it would work for everything else—including the meaning of life, the whole business of life, and God Himself. To this day, these ancient philosophers set thinkers off on a red herring trail. Paul knew what had happened, and he told the learned thinkers of Corinth that "*the world through wisdom did not know God*" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Faith is based on a personal relationship, not on a mathematical equation. We know what God did yesterday, but we have to trust Him for tomorrow. There are no guarantees. In many ways, faith is akin to love. It is a heart matter. We do not decide to fall in love after weighing all the pros and cons. Couples get married on trust, not on scientific evidence or conclusive logic.

Faith and Sight

Faith is also the eye through which we see the unseen. Physical optics will not enable us to perceive God. He is a Spirit. Mortal eyes are too weak to discern "*the invisible God*," "*the King eternal, immortal, invisible*" (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). We have to relate to Him as He is. "*He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6).

In faith, we find a better way of seeing. Our eyes can play tricks. Even Plato, the greatest of the Greek philosophers, said nothing is ever actually how it looks to us. But Moses "*endured as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Hebrews 11:27). If he believed only what we saw, what would a blind man believe? Radio waves fill your room, but you might never know it if you didn't have a receiver. One of God's great Bible names is *the Lord is there*.

God is invisible Spirit, and that is that. It is as useless to argue and expect God to be what He is not as it is to expect the moon to be made of green cheese. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). They are on the track of truth. If we want to know God, that is how, because that is what He is like. Wanting a visible God has led people to vast mistakes. People have made God in their own image, which the God of the Bible certainly is not and which contradicts the second commandment. (See Exodus 20:4.) It has led to idolatry and the setting up of images and icons. Today, some treat the living earth as God. They can see it, and they have a pretty big god, but the God of the

whole earth is still much bigger.

This desire for the invisible to become visible, of course, is where the gospel steps into the picture—because God did become visible. The apostle John wrote, “[He] *became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). In fact, John’s Gospel is all about seeing. In the first chapter alone, he makes eighteen references to seeing, writing about knowing as seeing. Similarly, in one of his letters, he began: “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life*” (1 John 1:1). John saw in Christ the Word of life, but some did not, and they crucified Him.

Not seeing is no reason for not believing. Nobody sees radiation. We wait for its effects. Nobody sees God, but millions find the effects in their lives. Unexpected and miraculous things sometimes happen—things that can only be from Him. Even one answered prayer, one healing, one miracle, one deliverance from addiction is evidence of Him. But we do not have just one. Millions of people are healed, millions are delivered, millions of prayers are answered, and millions have experiences that can only be attributed to Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead.

When I step on a platform in Africa or India or anywhere else, often—without any touch from me—the blind begin to see, the deaf begin to hear, the dumb begin to speak, the cripples begin to walk, and those who were driven to madness by evil spirits are released. It is not psychology, for even babies are healed in the womb. The greatest result is deliverance from sin and guilt and the transformation of people’s attitudes and personalities. Truly, Jesus saves.

Faith or Chaos?

The next fact is this: There is no substitute for faith in God. History rings the warning bells. Without the knowledge of the Lord God, nothing has ever made sense. The ancients, even the most brilliant thinkers, produced the wildest ideas, superstitions, and speculations. Mystery clothed nature. They were sure of nothing, not even of the weather or the seasons. To make the sun rise, they worshipped it. To summon rain, they bowed to the heavens. Through sacrifices, they persuaded the rivers to not dry up. Everybody had his or her own god. In this context, the prophets of God were raised up and inspired with a burning realization of God’s reality and His will.

The concept of God as the Father of all was unknown. Conflicts and family

blood feuds shaped history, and war was the glory of men. But Israel's prophets taught the people not to fear the signs of the heavens, and they told them to work instead of war. They promised that God would faithfully look after all His creatures and said they should not worry about harvests like the heathens around them did.

It is easy to casually say you do not believe in God. However, the consequences are eternal. They fertilize corruption, bribery, violence, terrorism, and crime. Atheists claim they can live decent lives without believing in God, but they forget they got the very idea of decency from Christianity. Before Christ, it was a different story and a far crueler world. In fact, we do not know what is good or bad without faith in God. Without Him, no one has ever agreed on the subject. A totally unbelieving world would be like a lunatic asylum taken over by its patients. If we do not trust God, we soon trust nobody.

Faith Is a Decision

The great Swiss theologian, Dr. Emil Brunner, summed up his thoughts in four words, Faith is a decision. He took it from Jesus, who always talked that way. He praised believers and blamed unbelievers. Just as we can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell—so too we can believe. That is our sixth sense or faculty, our spiritual eyesight, which Jesus also described as an ear to hear. (See Matthew 11:15.) It is a hand to take God's blessing.

Believing is not beyond anybody. "I am not made that way," some vainly plead, but we all are. Some think of faith as money, which seems like a good thing if you have some. But faith is not what you have; it's what you do. We can all rise to the heights—if we want to.

Who wants unbelief? It is a blind alley, the way to no land, no water, and no love. To get out of it, we must turn around. In Bible language, we must *repent*. That means deciding to believe instead of not believing. Doubt is deadly. Choose to live. "*Repent, and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:15).

Faith Is Spiritual Strength

One final fact about faith needs to be cleared up, especially for Christians. Very sanctified and spiritual people can sadly be doubters. Faith and piety do not always go down the street hand-in-hand. Some Christians think you have to be a spiritual giant in order to have great faith. This is backwards. It is the man or woman who is strong in faith who is the spiritual giant. Faith is spiritual strength.

Faith produces good works, but good works do not produce faith—just as milk produces butter, but butter does not produce milk.

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees

And looks to that alone,

Laughs at impossibilities

And cries, “It shall be done.”

FAITH, THE FUSE

The apostles said to the Lord, “*Increase our faith*” (Luke 17:5). Christians have wanted that ever since—faith in bulk! What did Jesus say in response? “*If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you*” (Luke 17:6).

That must have puzzled the apostles. They wanted big faith, but He spoke of the smallest thing they knew. By the way, Jesus did not refer to the mustard seed because it was very small! His point was the contrast between massive faith and small (but living) seed. He wanted to hammer home that faith is never a matter of size. *Size* is the wrong word. Faith has neither bulk nor weight. What shape is a thought? Believing is what you do; it is not a substance. Perhaps the apostles wanted faith to tackle bigger tasks. But it does not come beforehand. Scripture speaks of the “*proportion of faith*” (Romans 12:6); in other words, faith is proportionate to the job at hand; it is index-linked to the need. Like running and needing more air, your intake increases automatically.

Size loses its meaning, even for the task, when it is a faith task. The bigness of a hill, a house, and a molehill are all one to a bird flying over them. By faith we “*shall mount up with wings like eagles*” (Isaiah 40:31), and nothing will be insurmountable.

Active faith needs impossibilities. Religious faith (that is, faith confined to church buildings) does not have enough impossibility. Robust faith grows in the outside weather; otherwise, it will be a sickly plant.

Conductivity, not Size

Have you ever seen a mustard seed? You may need a magnifying glass to see it. But the people to whom Jesus spoke knew seeds. They lived in an agricultural world. Jesus spoke their farming language. Today we are a high-tech society, and

our expressions are scientific. Jesus spoke the language of the people, and today our expressions come from technology. No doubt today, Jesus would use our common speech.

Jesus spoke two thousand years ago about the mustard seed, a small thing with mighty potency. Maybe today He would talk about a microchip or fuse to illustrate His teaching. “If you have faith as small as an electric fuse, you could transplant trees from the soil to the sea.” Like the mustard seed, the value of a fuse is not in breadth or length. The key is conductivity. Faith transfers the power of God to wherever it is needed.

A fuse is made of a metal, such as silver wire, which offers low resistance to current. Low resistance means high conductivity. Translated into spiritual terms:

The *lower* our resistance to the Word, the **higher** the operational power of God.

The *higher* our resistance to the Word, the **lower** the operational power of God.

Low Word Resistance

A fuse with high resistance either carries no power at all or soon blows. When we resist the Word by unbelief, the power of God cannot come through. If we say we believe in the Word, but disobey it, we negate our faith. It blows the fuse. The power of God is low when the Word of God means little to us.

Whatever else may be true, one thing is absolutely beyond contradiction—Christianity is a power religion, or it is nothing. Liberals, those teachers of rationalist doctrine, rely on logic. The apostles relied on the power of God. “*The world through wisdom did not know God, [yet] it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe*” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Our heads can be our doubt box. Reasoning is too uncertain an instrument for vital personal relationships, especially with God. It is like using a shovel—instead of a telescope—to read the night sky. When people turn to science, with its algebraic equations, geology, or philosophic deductions, to approve religious faith, it is ridiculous. What can these things possibly have to do with spiritual experience? Science has no equipment to handle relationship with God. You may as well use a corkscrew to study music.

How do we believe, or not believe, in anybody? By mathematics? Have you ever felt that you cannot trust a person but have been unable to explain why? It is just a gut feeling. A higher self, the intuition, was at work, and it triggered an alarm.

I do not love thee Doctor Fell
The reason why I cannot tell,
But this I know, and know full well
I do not love thee Doctor Fell.¹

Yet we can believe in someone else for exactly the same reason, but what that is, we may not know. Instinct never warns us against Jesus. When we “get wise” to Him, we want to come closer. Knowing Him better, our hearts are warmed toward Him. “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). What unbelievers say is of less significance than what the barometer says. The proper way, the only possible way, is to trust Him. The effective center of true life is the heart, not the brain. “*With the heart one believes*” (Romans 10:10).

Faith by Hearing

Faith is not just abstract believing, with nothing special in mind. It is believing unto something and for something. The Word of God gives point, direction, and purpose. Without the Bible, life is like Longfellow’s poem:

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I know not where.²

In fact, the Bible is the only book that gives faith a positive goal. One wonders what some religions propose to do for people who believe. They become a religious treadmill, on which people believe for the sake of believing with no goal in sight.

The apostle Paul was aboard a sinking ship, but he said, “*I believe God*” (Acts 27:25). It was not a defiant sentiment but a specific declaration that all on board would be saved: “*God has granted you all those who sail with you*” (Acts 27:24). It was rather different with the man on an Atlantic crossing in a storm. He asked the captain if they were safe, and the captain, trying to reassure him, said, “Sir, we are in the hands of God.”

The man replied, “Is it as bad as that?”

Maxims of Faith

Here are some basics:

- To be believers, we should know *what* we believe and *whom* we believe.
- The most basic lesson is that we must take the Word of God

at its face value.

- Without knowing God's will, faith is impossible.
- The Word is the eternal will of God.
- To question Scripture is to question the only guide we have and to question God.
- The Word of God is an ultimatum, not an option for discussion.
- Democratic vote or consensus does not decide Bible truth. *"Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven"* (Psalm 119:89).
- The Bible is the constitution of the kingdom of God, and no two-thirds majority of any political body on earth can change it.

Resting on Authority

The Bible insists a thousand times on its own divine authority. The prophets, for example, were not offering their private political opinions when they spoke. Instead, *"holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21). They used the phrase, *"Thus says the Lord."* The Jewish concept was of a God of awful holiness, and they trembled before His awesome greatness.

Unless he had an overwhelming sense that God had sent him, no prophet of Israel would dare to claim he was the mouthpiece of this almighty Being. Only absolute certainty would open the prophets' mouths. Jeremiah declared:

Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. (Jeremiah 20:9)

The Authority of Christ

God spoke, and heaven and earth materialized. *"For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psalm 33:9). Then, when Jesus came to

earth, the Bible makes the tremendous assertion that “*the Word became flesh*” (John 1:14). The same voice that created all things now audibly spoke to humanity. What He said came with absolute authority. It is the Word of the Lord.

When Christ spoke, He said heaven and earth would pass away but His words would never pass away. (See Matthew 24:35.) He was not like the prophets. They spoke for the Lord, but Christ spoke *as* the Lord. The prophets said, “Thus says the Lord,” but Christ said, “*Most assuredly, I say to you*” (John 1:51). The Jews listened to Moses, but Jesus went beyond Moses, “*Moses...permitted...and I say...*” (Matthew 19:8–9).

While the prophets were sent with a message, Jesus *was* the message. The prophets spoke about the Lord, but Jesus spoke about *Himself*. He not only brought the Word of God, but He *was* the Word of God. He did not point to the way; He *is* the way. Jesus was not one of the roads that led to God. He *is* God.

For this reason, we have no right to doubt the Word of God or bend God’s exclamation mark into a question mark. If we do, we will find ourselves with the same dilemma the apostle Peter recognized: “*To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68). We either obey or we die. In modern technology language, we blow the fuse and suffer a lifelong power failure. The heating fails, the lights go out, communications cease, the systems break down, and cold eternal night settles in.

Liberal teachers scorn people like us. They say we have an “authoritarian religion.” But do they teach without any authority? All learning is based on authority, either divine or human. Some trust in the authority of scholarship, but nothing is less trustworthy. Their arguments are steps in sand. Scholars never agree with one another. The Word of God has been a light to a hundred generations, and that lamp has never flickered.

Wisdom itself loses its way without revelation. The modern poet, Philip Larkin, proved this. He was an atheist. Just before he died, in 1996, journalist Martyn Harris wrote about Larkin, saying his godlessness had left him “drunk, suicidal, self-obsessed, and paralyzed by misery.” In his poem, “Aubade,” Larkin himself described his desolation as he faced a bleak eternity. He waited for...

The total emptiness forever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always.”³

Faith in God seems a vague sentiment, but it solidifies into reality. We can “cast ourselves upon the ocean of the unknown” with wonderful assurance. Jesus said,

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23).

Learning and Getting Somewhere

When I traveled from my home country, Germany, to Africa, the major lesson I had to learn was that I needed to unlearn the business of questioning God. We may question politicians, but we must believe God.

For example, Christ said in Mark 16:17–18, *“These signs will follow those who believe...they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”* It is not necessary for me to consult intellectuals for their approval; instead, my job is to obey the Word of God. I do what God says, and then He does what He has said. When I moved to Africa, God changed the polarity of my heart and spirit, and then He began to use me to shake whole nations. God used the rod of Moses, and so He uses us when we follow His orders. I see His power at work time after time. My fuse faith has held, and the currents of blessing have flowed through my life to millions of precious people to redeem their souls by the blood of the Lamb.

Why Look on Us?

We cannot generate power by anything we do, either through music, worship, or atmosphere. As soon as two or three gather in His name, Christ is there. Immediately, the throne is built. We do not need to take an hour of worship to build it, and we do not need to pull power down from heaven. It is impossible for Christians to even meet together in His name without Christ being among them in power.

If it was up to us to produce the power of God, we would be the power generators. But Christ *gave* us power. That means we are not called to go into the entire world with our own little power plant, causing other people to think how wonderful we are. We can parade our own charisma and make the sparks fly for an hour, but soon our power plant will run out of fuel and begin to cough and die. We are not generators but conductors. *“Of His fullness we have all received”* (John 1:16); He is *“the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (Ephesians 1:23). We are channels, not the source. *“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me”* (John 15:4).

Power Stations

God does not need any of our energy dynamos. He has His own, two of them, right here on earth—the cross and the empty tomb. Power flows forever from those sources, day and night, without power outages or breakdowns. The voltage is unfailing and reliable. The flow does not fluctuate but remains steady because it comes “*from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*” (James 1:17).

Here is our full equipment:

- The spiritual energies of the cross and the resurrection.
- The power lines of the Word of God.
- The fuse of our faith, the vital link.

They give us:

- Power for every need.
- Power to change lives.
- Power to break vicious habits.
- Power to heal the sick.
- Power to light the storm-darkened highway of life.

No power on earth, whether created in test tubes or in industrial plants, can do any of those things. The power of God is the only force on earth capable of dealing with the unmanageable problems of life.

At a conference, I overheard some young people say, “We must be switched on for Jesus. All it takes is to be switched for Him.”

I turned to them and said, “Yes, it is good to be switched on for Jesus, but it is more important to be plugged in. Switching on for Jesus will be useless unless we are plugged in. We must be connected first.” Being switched on to ourselves produces no current.

The Live Link

The power of God coming through the Word reaches the faith fuse first; often that faith fuse is the preacher. That tiny bridge of power can become very warm, and a preacher of the Word is often the first to feel that warmth. He burns with

the charge. He is likely to show it, and he should. He is a communicator, not of his own thoughts but of the power of God. He should be a live wire. A preacher is a person having an experience with God in public. If he represses his exuberance and puts polish, elegance, and propriety first, he should remember that joy is the fruit of the Spirit, not these qualities. “*The joy of the Lord is your strength*” (Nehemiah 8:10), not your weakness.

If an experienced electrician touches a bare wire and gets a shock, he may just say, “Oh!” But anybody who gets an electric shock for the first time is likely to react more dramatically. God’s power is not fiction but fact. It is the greatest reality we know.

If God did manifest Himself, what would we expect? A graveyard or a resurrection? Dynamic life may seem unseemly at first. But when people experience the flowing current of divine blessing, they will understand the need for such lively action. Nobody knows what it is like to meet Jesus Christ until they do.

One exuberant preacher was told, “Please restrain yourself!”

He replied, “I am restraining myself!”

Completing the Circuit

Great power lines stretch across a whole country, carrying perhaps 110,000 volts on a single cable. Day and night, the huge power turbines, housed in towering buildings, feed the vast system, harnessing the forces of coal, water, oil, or nuclear fission. Yet at home, if a tiny sliver of wire fails, everything in the house stops, because there is no power.

The greatness of God, the greatness of the work of Christ, and the greatness of the Word of God are all powerfully present, but without faith, as small as a fuse wire, none of that greatness prevails. The circuit is broken. The power bridge is down.

If the faith fuse fails, the dynamic of God is defused, and it will be refused by those to whom we preach. Conversely, if we take the Word and add in the faith fuse, then the power of God will come through to produce light, warmth, energy, salvation, healing, strength, and blessing.

Power Anywhere

Once I went to a very upscale hairdressing salon to get a haircut. Two ladies were working, one of whom began to cut my hair. Typical of hairdressers, she

talked while working and asked whether I was a businessman. I told her, “I am a man of God.” We spent some time talking, and in a short time, I led both of the ladies to Christ. They knelt in the hair on the floor while they prayed the prayer of salvation. When I left the shop, I heard one with tears in her eyes saying to the other, “That man of God came in for a haircut—what a glorious day!”

I went out very happy and moved. Then I met my colleague, Peter van den Berg. I said to him “Peter, I see you need a haircut, too. Go and get your haircut in that salon. I have led two women to Christ in there. Go and do the follow up!”

Jesus said, “*If you have faith as a mustard seed*” (Matthew 17:20). It is so little! Our faith is no towering sensation that everybody sees and grasps. It is the hidden fuse. But by it, the energies of heaven flow into the world. God uses main fuses and sub-fuses, but never subterfuge. Wherever we are, the hidden attitude of our hearts is God’s missing link—“*Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?*” (John 11:40).

1. Tom Brown.
2. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Arrow and the Song,” lines 1–2.
3. Philip Larkin, “Aubade,” lines 16–18.

PART 2

FROM FAITH TO FAITH

Tradition tells us the great Greek writer Homer wandered from town to town begging for bread and telling his stories of the siege of Troy. That's how storytellers made a living in that day. Books and television did not yet exist, but everybody loved a good story.

Scripture also uses story to teach us. It is not a book of academic theology. Yet the divine author did incorporate into the Bible's stories subtle character drawings to create faith in God in our hearts. We will look first at some gospel incidents.

The nobleman mentioned in John 4:46–54 showed faith in Christ's powers by coming all the way from Capernaum to Cana—a day's journey—in order to ask Christ to go to his house and heal his dying son. Jesus said a strange thing to him: “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe*” (verse 48). It was strange, because the man had believed enough to travel that distance to see Christ. But Jesus had another kind of faith in mind. The man was not put off by this apparently cold reception. He still believed and said, “*Sir, come down, before my child dies!*” (verse 49).

Jesus did not do what the nobleman wanted. He did not go down to Capernaum. He simply said to the man, “*Go your way; your son lives*” (John 4:50). This meant extra faith. He had believed Jesus could heal his son if He came, and he was willing to make the journey. But now he had to believe Jesus was even bigger than that.

The nobleman departed, and the Bible says he “*believed the word that Jesus spoke to him*” (verse 50). He did not arrive home until the next day. Along the way, all the man had was this brief word of Jesus to keep him hoping every step and every minute. But when he neared home and discovered the miracle had taken place, then—John records—real faith came. “*He himself believed, and his*

whole household” (John 4:53). It was not the miracle they believed in. That was there to see, not just to be believed. They believed in Christ. That is the way that John always talks about believing, as a commitment to Christ.

Another telling incident is in John 9. Without so much as saying, “Excuse me,” Jesus healed a blind man by plastering mud across his eyes and sending him to wash in the famous pool of Siloam. The man came back with good sight. On his return, he learned it was Jesus who had performed this miracle. When asked about it, he said, “*A Man called Jesus*” (John 9:11) did it.

The people, who seemed unfamiliar with Christ’s identity, asked, “*Where is He?*” (verse 12).

After a group of Pharisees questioned him, they said, “*This Man is not from God*” (verse 16). They had decided Jesus was just a man.

However, faith began to arise. First, some of the Pharisees said, “*How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?*” (verse 16).

This question caused people to start wondering who Jesus really was. They asked the man who had been healed, and he said, “*He is a prophet*” (John 9:17). The leading Jews had agreed to excommunicate from the temple anybody who said Jesus was the Christ, but now they were faced with the fact of a man born blind suddenly seeing.

They questioned him further, trying to get him to say Jesus was a sinner, but he would not. Instead, he declared, “*God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him...If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing*” (John 9:31, 33). Through the questioning, the man’s faith developed, and he believed Christ was not a sinner but was sent from God. For this he suffered persecution and was labeled as a disciple of Jesus.

Later, Jesus found the man, whom the authorities had thrown out of the temple. Like so many in the world today, they had rejected those who testified to the goodness of God. Jesus had one important question to ask the man. It was not whether he felt grateful or if he had started to work. He asked, “*Do you believe in the Son of God?*” (John 9:35).

The man did not know what Jesus meant. “*Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?*” (verse 36).

As a blind man, He had possessed enough faith in Jesus to feel his way to the pool of Siloam because Jesus told him to. That brought him physical sight. Another kind of faith could bring him far greater illumination, but his faith had not yet reached that point.

Jesus said, “*You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you*” (John 9:37).

The man looked at Christ, and his faith exploded; he instantly accepted Christ’s declaration, saying, “*Lord, I believe*” (verse 38). Then, “*he worshiped Him.*” His faith was complete.

The account of the woman of Samaria in John 4 is another powerful lesson on faith. It illustrates how a sinner can take a profound leap of faith into the heights of the supernatural. A nameless woman came to draw water from a well while Jesus was resting there from a hot and long walk. He astonished her by asking her for a drink of water. She must have thought He was an odd sort of Jew to be so free, breaking all the rules by speaking to a Samaritan. And even more so when He said He could give her a drink of water that would be “*living water...a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John 4:10, 14).

At that point, she decided to humor Him, thinking Him slightly irrational. So she said, “*Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw*” (verse 15). She certainly did not expect Him to actually deliver.

In response, Jesus simply said, “*Go, call your husband, and come here*” (verse 16). Putting on an air of innocence, she said she didn’t have one. Jesus then shattered her pretense with a recitation of her sullied life and her Hollywood-like record of husbands.

The woman must have stared at Him in shock as she said, “*Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet*” (John 4:19). She had advanced in perception and faith.

Jesus next shook her ideas about worship after she, trying to start a fight, made a retort rooted in four hundred years of argument between the Jews and Samaritans about the proper place to worship. Christ’s reply was totally new. Worship had nothing to do with place or time; worship is anywhere, everywhere, and always. God wanted people whose worship was not confined to a local spot or fixed schedule. Feeling lost at such a theological depth, she tried to edge around it by saying such matters would be settled when the Messiah came.

She was getting closer. Then Jesus said, “*I who speak to you am He*” (John 4:26). Her faith soared. She looked again at this man, who had seen her past like a movie and swept her out of her depth with His profound teaching. And she believed. Excited, she rushed back to town, telling everybody about Jesus and asking, “*Could this be the Christ?*” (verse 29).

Many men then went to the well to see this man who had so deeply affected her and to find out if He was, in fact, the Messiah. They, too, fell under His divine

influence and invited Him to stay in the town. For two days, He stayed among them, and by the end, they said, “*This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (John 4:42). The woman had believed, sinful as she was.

In each of these incidents, the development of faith was swift and always ended with a commitment to a relationship, a taking hold of Jesus personally. One who is a mere believer in God still has a long way to go, but the gap can be crossed as fast as light. One minute we can be far from God, and the next minute we can be bound to Him eternally through faith—“*together with Christ*” (Ephesians 2:5). We become in a moment the embodiment of what He said to the Father about His disciples: “*They are Yours...and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them...and none of them is lost*” (John 17:9–12).

Faith’s Embrace

Faith in Christ is different from any other kind of faith. It is not found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the word used means believing *into* Christ (Greek: *eis*). That word suggests movement. The ordinary Greek word for *in* (Greek: *en*) describes a set position, but the Greek expression used for faith in Christ means “moving close to Him in trustful love.” It is an embrace.

This kind of loving embrace between man and his Maker comes only through Christ. Nobody in the Old Testament days could think of such a thing. God was spirit, another kind of being who was too holy and too awesome to be approached except with fear and trembling. Yet one inspired book in the Old Testament Scriptures touches the heart of a new experience—the Song of Songs, a lyric of love that gathers up all its words of supreme love in one phrase, “*I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine*” (Song of Songs 6:3). No one understood this attitude toward God until Christ came.

When Jesus came, the Song of Songs was fulfilled. He is the great beloved one. The dry, loveless, religious world of the Jews had no spiritual experience that corresponded to the Song of Songs. Any passionate embrace between heaven and earth was unknown till Jesus came. He is the divine lover, and we are those whom He came to love.

A woman emptied a flask of priceless ointment upon the head of Christ in holy adoration. A street girl washed His feet with her tears and towed them with her hair. A hard-hearted tax collector went wild with joy and decided to give his money away. Jerusalem had never seen anything like it. They had seen fanatical fury burning murderously in men’s eyes, but not this adoring wonder.

But then, Jesus began it Himself, for we read:

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end... knowing that...He had come from God and was going to God...[He] rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself...and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel.” (John 13:1–5)

Jesus is the God we can fling our arms around. His mother Mary did, and so did Mary Magdalene.

Faith, the Golden Gift

An amazing quality of faith is its suddenness, how it comes upon us all in an instant. Something shifts—often in an ordinary, not-very-dramatic moment—and suddenly we step over a border, and we believe. Just like that, we *know* who Jesus is. It does not always come framed in all the right words, and it may not conform to a classic conversion experience, but within our souls we experience intuition. We see it; we know—if this world has any meaning—He is the one who will come. He is the key, the answer to the riddle of existence, the focus. Jesus Christ crystallizes people’s ideas about God.

In the Old Testament, people sometimes received revelation about God, but only rarely and only special individuals, such as Abraham, Jacob, and the prophets. The mass of people moved very slowly and often backwards, while God used various circumstances and methods to help them have faith. But the coming of Jesus has swept the world. Somehow, Calvary did what the awesome manifestations of Sinai could not do. Jesus is the great faith-creator. Looking back over the long cheerless world history of uncertainty and doubt, we can see when the pattern of revelation changed. It came with the gospel. It awakened sleeping trust. The dawn had come.

Jesus said, “*No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). It was a pragmatic, simple fact. Nobody ever had found God, and nobody ever has to this day, except through Christ. There are religions enough, pointing a thousand different ways, but Christ is the way. He does not point to a way. He is the door, and He flings heaven wide open. “*Come unto Me...and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). “*Do not fear*” (Luke 12:32).

FAITH IN THREE TENSES

God's Will, the Rock of Creation

Today, yesterday knocks on our door, telling us about tomorrow. What we believe will be in the future comes from what has already happened. Like the weather, life is a matter of probabilities, except for one factor—the will of God. God is not affected by changes. God's will is the key to bringing order from chaos.

As I have said before, this business of faith is needed for the whole business of life. We have to take it on trust that the water from our taps is not toxic. But my concern is living itself. We can either make a mess of it or a make good job of it. We can fail at living yet succeed in making a living. We can have a good living and yet live a poor life. But *“godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”* (1 Timothy 4:8).

Faith can snap us out of our snug little burrows and get us going for God. What God has done and is doing in Africa tells me what will happen in the future. I trust God because He has a “proven track record,” as they say. He has always handled things well, thousands of times, in my work.

There are three tenses of faith, as shown in this verse: *“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work...will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6). The Christian confidence is that who God was, He is and will be. *“Though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident”* (Psalm 27:3). His will cannot be challenged or changed; it shapes the future. In His will we are secure. *“He who does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:17).

The Secret Half of Faith

Afflicted people are often thought to be less intelligent. The Bible is not like that. For example, it shows the leper in Matthew 8 to be a man of outstanding acumen who saw what few others had expressed. He met Jesus and said, “*Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean*” (Matthew 8:2). Many put the cart before the horse, saying, “If you can, you will.” That is human thinking, not revelation; certainly, it is not Bible talk. God always can, but will He?

For the leper, it was a revelation. He saw that everything depended on Christ’s will. The leper’s faith was reasonable—“*If You are willing, You can.*” The Bible was not written to tell us what God can do. We all know what He can do. God is Almighty; He can do anything. Otherwise, we would not call Him God. The Bible is here to tell us what He *will* do. That is what we want to know.

So what is He willing to do? The answer is, “His Word is His will.” It is a short answer that comes in a long book—sixty-six Bible books, in fact. Each book gives us special help; it builds our understanding of God and His character. Then we know what He will do.

Christ taught us to pray, “*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10). The will of God certainly is not always done on earth now. God’s goodness continues, but a bad devil, who is permitted freedom for the time being, complicates every issue.

If we lived in a perfect world, we would not need faith. When we get to glory, faith will not apply. Everything in heaven will be secure; faith becomes sight, and evil is excluded. But this world is imperfect. Sin and the devil produce uncertainties. Logic cannot produce hope. Logic cannot predict the next five minutes. It has to be faith in God.

The key words to this concept are *I will*. God is the God of goodwill. When we come to Him, we find His arms open in willing welcome. “*All day long I have stretched out My hands*” (Romans 10:21). His face shines upon us.

How His Will Worked Out

Today, our Bible provides us with a means of learning from the experiences of those who first ventured on the road of faith. “*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The people of the Bible struggled with God’s goodness and the problem of evil. Their story helps us in the good fight of faith. It shows how the goodwill of God worked out for them. We should remember that they had the same human nature, lived in the same world, and had the same God as we do. James reminds us that “*Elijah was a*

man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). In fact, the world was a far more frightening and mysterious place for them than for us, with our advanced knowledge. But they learned to lean on God.

In fact, Israel was the most harried and persecuted race on earth, yet it was Israel who gave us the most glorious recommendation to trust in God.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:2–3)

After three thousand years, Israel is still present among us!

The story, in the book of Daniel, of the three Hebrews who were cast into a furnace alive and came out alive is a picture of their race. For two and a half thousand years, the “chosen people” have gone through the furnace of affliction, but they have emerged and occupy newspaper columns every day. It confirms Psalm 124:1–5:

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul.

The Bible message of faith comes to us out of the crucible of suffering, and yet it is the happiest book ever written. It contains 653 references to joy and gladness.

Many believers have a past tense faith; they believe God has done things. In fact, most people can believe anything if it took place a long time ago or will take place far in the future. They can accept a promise like, “*All things work together for good to those who love God*” (Romans 8:28), which might mean eternity. But they find it harder to believe, “*I am the Lord who heals you*” (Exodus 15:26). They have a past faith but not a present faith. They believe in the God of Moses and Elijah; they believe Jesus worked miracles and the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples. But that is empty faith unless it transfers to today, unless they believe He will carry on the good work.

The Revelation in Revelation

One man with the message of a past, present, and future faith was John the apostle. When he was up against the whole Roman Empire, he wrote a

marvelous and triumphant book. He said,

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:9)

John was close to Jesus in a unique way. He also suffered for Christ. And John was the man who saw what things meant; He read the signs with prophetic insight. What he saw was difficult to explain. It was new on earth. Nobody had thought of what he said in Revelation 1:4–5:

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

How can Jesus be a *faithful witness*? We are witnesses to Christ, but to what does Christ witness? This Scripture refers back to another passage:

The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.” Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going...I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” (John 8:13–14, 18)

Jesus witnesses to Himself. He said, “*You believe in God, believe also in Me*” (John 14:1). By His life and mighty deeds, He has shown us who He is. He witnesses to who He is. He is faithful to what He said about Himself, and He does not disappoint us. If He was different now, He would not be a faithful witness. But His actions are consistent with what He said. Jesus’ life spells hope for sinners and the sick and offers concern for everybody. He writes, “Yours faithfully, Jesus Christ.”

Now, notice something; God confirms His faithfulness in this text in the words, “*who is and who was and who is to come*” (Revelation 1:8). These are unusual words, because it says, “*who is to come.*” According to normal rules of grammar, this should read, “*who will be*”—using the same verb *to be*. Jesus used it twice when He said, “*who is and who was*”; then He switched to a different verb and said, “*who is to come.*” Anybody can see that this is unusual. Why does He state it in this peculiar way?

The reason for this is simple—God is unusual. He baffles grammar and syntax, and when we speak of Him, sometimes we need to push the language around to

properly convey the truth. Christ Himself was a mystery. *“No one knows the Son except the Father”* (Matthew 11:27), and when we talk about Him in ordinary language, we always leaves something out.

When it comes to the Lord, human language is never good enough. The first Christians had to give new meanings to many words and even coin new words because Jesus did new things and was a new kind of person. God Himself did not communicate about Himself with mere words, such as Mohammed’s final testament or Joseph Smith’s Mormon revelations. God simply presented Himself with His actions, and to describe Him we often need a bigger alphabet. It is like angel music that needs a new notation system. When we speak of God, we often lack adequate words and feel like the Queen of Sheba. When seeing Solomon’s court, she said, *“Indeed the half was not told me”* (1 Kings 10:7).

God has never relied on mere words to inspire our faith in Him. In order to show us who and what He is, He came!

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

With this in mind, let’s return to Revelation 1:8 and the surprising statement that He is the one *“to come.”* Simply put, it means He is everlastingly breaking in upon us. In Matthew 11:3, we find the same message, where some people asked Jesus, *“Are You the Coming One?”* God is not a *“will be”* God, and He is not in the process of becoming something later on. What He will be, He is now and always has been; He is the eternal, unchanging one. He is already perfect. *“I am the Lord, I do not change”* (Malachi 3:6).

It is different for us as individuals. We are always finding something new in Him. Suppose you stand in the water at the edge of the River Thames. You are at the river, yet also the river keeps coming toward you. And the water that you stand in will be the same river that somebody else may stand in tomorrow farther downstream as the waters flow. God is like that. We come to Him. He is there, and yet He keeps coming to us. He is not just *“being”* God somewhere, like the Sphinx, just being mysterious. *“We will come”* (John 14:23) Jesus said, and He never stops coming, not now, not ever.

FAITH IN THE GOD OF THE PAST

The God of Yesterday

Twice in one chapter of Revelation, God calls Himself “*He who was*” (Revelation 1:4,8). “The God who was” is how half the world thinks of Him—the one who created heaven and earth and has done little ever since. Limited to that idea, people may as well have faith in Pharaoh Tutankhamen.

That is foolish. Could a God of such creative imagination settle down to be a God of long ago, seated in heaven with his hands folded in his lap? Did He fill the empty skies with unsurpassing beauty and then go to sleep? Is that a rational theory? If we do not see farther than that, we are not very perceptive. Could any of us even build a house and abandon it? Could God ignore His own universe? If we want faith, let us look at this.

The One Who Creates

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). So what? Why should God do any such thing? He did not do it to please anyone, as there was no one around, only Himself! He pleased Himself when He did it. He was not obliged to do so. No compulsion rested upon Him. He was not pressured. He wanted to do it.

What a person does because of desire shows who that person is and what that person is like. If I sat down in my room, shut the door, and played the organ, it would be for my own pleasure. It would tell people I am musical and I love music.

God brought the glittering stars and the planets into being. That is God! “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*” So begins Psalm 19. The writer is thrilled, but it is the magnificence of God, not the

splendor of the universe, that he is excited about. He is distracted from creation by the Creator. Often science cannot see the wood for the trees. Modern science takes everything apart, like taking a violin apart to see what makes the sound. It loses the divine radiance. I imagine God standing by, pensively watching us as we act like children opening their Christmas stockings, and all the while, He is waiting to love us. Fathers are often forgotten for the sake of Christmas toys.

God pulled a blank sheet of paper across His desk, thought, and then designed everything we see around us. Its substance was shaped out of His own grandeur; He Himself must be absolutely and eternally breathtaking.

Now we can see it. It tells us God obviously delights in activity, color, beauty, wonder, life, and so much more. Why did He make us? Surely it was not for fun. He made us for the same reason we long for children—to fulfill our instinct to love. What He is must come out as long as He exists, on and on. Faith—that is the first thing about the God in whom we believe.

The Good God

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). His idea of what was good was framed in a material world, not an abstract spiritual principle of goodness. God does not deal in abstractions. He is pragmatic, the God of earth and sea, animals, trees and birds, fish and people. *“We are His people”* (Psalm 100:3). He made it all, made us, and was happy about it. He loved it—*“God so loved the world”* (John 3:16).

He molded this beautiful globe and said “Good! Good! Good!” seven times in Genesis 1. He clapped His hands with pleasure, and the morning stars sang together for joy. (See Job 38:7.) The whole process works toward good. Evil fights it, but it will never prevail. *“All things work together for good”* (Romans 8:28). God is good. When things are wrong, we ask “why?” Of course we do. God put that in us. We hate evil because He does. God put that *why* in our souls. Even Jesus said *why* when He experienced the utmost agony on the cross. A good God is the God of true faith. That is the God of the Bible, which is where the idea of a good God came from. The pagans did not have the remotest idea of a good God.

The God of Miracles

“God said let there be...and there was” (Genesis 1:3). Creation was the first and greatest of all miracles. If God could extrude the Himalayas and the Rockies through His cupped hands and with his finger scoop out the hollows for the

Pacific and the Atlantic and cap the poles with miles-thick ice, what is the difficulty in God healing deaf ears or blind eyes? Are miracles possible? What a question! How dull can we be? But then, doubt does dull our thinking.

It is absurd for anybody to say miracles cannot happen. To know that, we would have to know everything about everything and everything about God. Nobody knows enough to declare that miracles cannot be. It is the height of human arrogance to assume such omniscience.

Action Words

Take a glance at the next book, Exodus. The first great historic character in the Bible, after Adam and Eve, is Abraham. God spoke to him and made a covenant with him. About eight centuries after Abraham, God took up Moses. He had not forgotten His covenant with Abraham, the great father of all who believe. (See Exodus 6:5.) The Lord told Moses what He was doing with these action words: See what I will do....I appeared....I have also established My covenant...I have also heard...I have remembered....I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm....I will take you as My people, and I will be your God....I will bring you into the land which I swore to give. (Exodus 6:1–8)

I have come down....I will send you....I will certainly be with you....I have surely visited you...I will bring you up out....I will stretch out My hand. (Exodus 3:8, 10, 12, 16–17, 20)

That is a swift sketch of the God of the past. One could build on that picture through the Scripture accounts of when God became the God of Israel, the God of Samuel, David, and Isaiah, and then “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3). That is the God who used to be.

However, for some people, God stays as a used-to-be God. Millions get no farther, and God for them is perhaps around somewhere, but He generally seems to have gone into retirement. Jesus did wonderful things; He was crucified, raised, and taken to heaven. And for them, that is the end of the episode. Period. There God is, firmly anchored in history, and Christ is beyond the blue, never to be active again.

God Did Not Disappear

A writer has authored a book suggesting that God withdrew from the Bible. But

since Jesus came, God has become more and more vivid in the Bible and in the world, even to this very day. It took 348 pages for this writer to put his theory together, but just one miracle demolishes the idea. If anybody thinks God has dwindled away or done the vanishing trick, let him or her come to Africa. I have seen Him there, manifested in greater power than anywhere in the Old Testament. I have seen Him expelling demons, restoring the sick, and healing the blind, the cripples, and the deaf. God did not do that even with Moses. God is shaking cities and nations. Perhaps that is where God “disappeared to”—living among those who believe Him!

The idea that God disappeared is an old fear of unbelief. Israel participated in the Exodus, saw His glory, and knew it was all true. But within months, they became mistrustful. They wanted something to see, so they made a golden calf to lead them back into slavery. (See Exodus 32.) Unbelief always leads to slavery. Faith means freedom.

However, they all lost their passports and visas of faith in God and never crossed the border into the Promised Land, with two exceptions—Caleb and Joshua, who held onto theirs and entered in. Unbelief is that old. It is neither clever nor modern. Eve doubted. For her and us, doubt is a satanic piece of foolishness that never did anybody any good.

If we are to relate to God, how on earth can we do it except by trusting Him? He will not have much trust with those who give Him the cold shoulder or pretend He does not exist. He owes us nothing, and if we want it to be that way, He will not interfere. *“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting”* (Romans 1:28).

Believers Who Did Not See Miracles

After the death of Joshua, very few people ever saw a miracle until Christ came, except under the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. In fact, very little happened that was supernatural. Yet men and women displayed amazing faith. Jesus spoke of them and said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29). They read the Scriptures and believed the God of the Exodus could not fail them and would work on their behalf. And He did. David, for example, never saw a miracle and had only the slightest experience of the supernatural, yet he went ahead in total expectation of divine help. Today, three thousand years later, his faith is still a model for us.

Gideon and Ezra

The book of Judges talks about Gideon. He had heard of the great things God had done when He brought His people out of the bondage of Egypt. He wanted to see the same God at work in his day, and He believed the mighty arm of two centuries before had not lost its strength. God honored his faith. The story of Gideon tells how a great triumph came about without human prowess and power. Again, God delivered little Israel, as He had delivered them before from Egypt. Gideon rightly asked, “*Where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about?*” (Judges 6:13). God showed him! He chose three hundred men without a sword among them. Through them, the largest army of desert people that had ever been mustered panicked and fled, so soundly defeated that they never recovered to invade Israel again. Until then, Gideon only knew God from the past.

Ezra, a member of the Jewish priestly tribe, also gives us an inspiring example. Ezra was brought up in Babylon and became a palace officer who was highly esteemed by the emperor of Medo-Persia. His book chronicles the various returns of the Jews from exile. After Medo-Persia conquered the Babylonian Empire, a new policy was introduced. The Medo-Persians decided to repopulate the areas that had been laid waste seventy years before, when Babylonian armies had confiscated half of the Middle East. It meant resettling about 50,000 Jews in Judea. In order to give them a sense of national identity, the Medo-Persians also gave them back their priceless temple treasures.

Many years later, Ezra was asked to lead the second return from exile of about 6,000 Jews. The countryside through which this host of families would travel was ruined and unpoliced. Lawless tribesmen covered the camel tracks with murder and pillage, preying on travelers and sometimes destroying entire caravans. For this reason, the emperor wanted the returning Jews to travel under military protection during the five months journey. They needed it.

However, Ezra boasted that God, who had looked after Israel for forty years in the wilderness and brought them out of Egypt, could well take care of them for five months. That sounds very religious, but the truth is that neither Ezra nor anybody else at that time had ever seen a vision, heard God’s voice, witnessed a healing or miracle, or had any sign from God whatsoever. Ezra was not a prophet.

Ezra had nothing but the Scriptures. However, he believed God by resting purely upon the written Scriptures. He put the whole project into operation under

the wings of the Lord. They set out, a very tempting opportunity for plunderers, and five months later, they arrived at Jerusalem without any loss of life or money. The invisible hand of God had performed a feat of protection. It is one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible. Sheer trust in nothing else than a record of what God had done many years before.

The evidences of the power of God around us today would top Mount Everest. We see every kind of wonder and literally millions of healing miracles; we receive fantastic revelations of Christ through visions, dreams, and providence; we experience miracles of answered prayer, conversion, provision, guidance, angelic protection, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and power over demonic forces.

This will go on until Jesus comes. But if it all stopped, in one hundred years, would people look back on it with awe or incredulity. Some would say it was all hearsay. Today, we are in the midst of it as Israel was in the Red Sea. Yet like many in Israel, many people today see the display of God's awesome greatness but crawl through life unimpressed, mistrustful, and fearful.

Christ's Greatest Miracle, a Challenge to Faith

The supreme miracle in the New Testament was the raising of Lazarus four days after his death. It provides some classic lessons in faith. When Christ came, Lazarus' sister, Martha, met Him and said, "*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died*" (John 11:21).

In other words, Martha displayed a marvelous faith for yesterday: "*If you had been here five days ago, I believe there would have been a miracle.*" *If* was Martha's word, a favorite word for believers who believe for the past. Anything could have happened yesterday—if.

Old faith is like old fish, like the day-old manna described in Exodus and Numbers. If they kept yesterday's manna, it would breed worms and stink. Faith has to be today's faith.

Jesus told Martha, "*Your brother will rise again.*"

Martha replied, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" (John 11:23–24). Martha also had faith for tomorrow—the last day. It is so often like that. People believe a miracle will happen sometime, in God's good time, when revival comes and when things are different.

When Christ worked miracles in the common streets of villages and cities, according to the scholars, it was the wrong time. According to them, it was only to happen when the apocalyptic world dawned and God drew near to earth,

angels flew in the skies, the sleeping dead awoke, and Messiah reigned in the half-heavenly conditions, which were to turn earth into paradise. They believed that one day the lame would leap like the deer and the blind would see—but not now, while Roman soldiers occupied the holy city. The miracles they saw in Jerusalem or Galilee could not be genuine; it must be the devil at work—or so the Rabbis thought.

Miracles today are always suspect to the critics. Tongues must not be the same tongues as on the day of Pentecost. Angels were real then, but they are hallucinations now. Bible miracles were real miracles, but those of today are spurious. They will be real in the millennium, but never now! (Ironically, since nobody will be sick in the millennium, no healings will be necessary then!) God actually answered prayer in Bible days, but now it is all coincidence and exaggeration. There was real revival two hundred years ago, but the quality is missing today. The critics think people today do not even pray like they used to do, and all the greatest men and women of God lived yesterday. There were giants in the earth in those days, but Christians now are all pygmies. O unbelief, how ancient and intransigent you are! As Jesus said, “*O you of little faith*” (Matthew 6:30); “*How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?*” (Matthew 17:17)

When Jesus went to the grave of Lazarus and told the people to remove the stone that blocked the mouth of the tomb, Martha was shocked. She said, “*Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days*” (John 11:39).

His reply still rings in all our ears, rattling against our impervious pessimism like welcome rain on the hard dirt of the wilderness: “*Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?*” (John 11:40). If you doubt, you will not move a molehill, not to mention a mountain. That day, the God of the past performed the greatest wonder ever seen, and Lazarus walked out of the grave.

The God of Moses and Elijah is not behind us but ahead of us. He has brought in the kingdom age, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. “*All things are possible to him who believes*” (Mark 9:23). We can, you know!

PART 3

FAITH BREAKTHROUGH

Faith, the Gift of God to All

God plans for nothing to be ordinary. Jesus pointed to the lilies as examples of superb beauty; they were probably hyacinths, whose every petal and leaf are utter perfection.

In the Kingdom of God, the extraordinary is so common that it is ordinary. Each person is special. The Shepherd with a hundred sheep searches for one gone astray. The boy David, the young outsider in Jesse's warrior family, was chosen to be anointed as the future King. Christianity is the religion of the unwanted.

Faith is fertile ground in which God grows His plants and trees. He plants qualities in the man or woman of faith that presently become admired anywhere. Little people take on stature by faith in Christ. They have zest and a grip on life, and they tackle difficulties with determination and confidence. It is common for believers to perform beyond their natural capacity. Jesus said to the unlearned fishermen on Galilee, "*I will make you!*" (Matthew 4:19). They switched direction and also elevation.

Nevertheless, some say, "Well, I am not a faith person." For them, there is bad news and good news. The bad is that "*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*" (Hebrews 11:6). The good is that we can all be "faith people." Faith is so vital that God intends nobody to be faithless. The road to faith is wide open.

Only one thing needs to be said about it—faith is not for the gold digger. God, who made all the wealth there is, is not against wealth, but those whose god is gold can expect no help from heaven. Jesus' Parable of the Sower, in Luke 8:14, uses a word that has passed into the English language as *hedonism* (Greek: *hedone*), "the pursuit of pleasure." He said, "*Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity*" (Luke 8:14). The same plain words address us in James 4:3, "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*" A life-aim of riches is

stupid, because in the end, we cannot take it with us. But we gain eternal profit by following Christ's directions: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33).

Divine Principle of Action

The absolute ABC of faith is that as we act, God acts. We respond to Him by faith, and He responds to us for faith. Paul found that it operated like the blood flowing through his veins.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Here are some examples from Scripture:

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

They spoke and the Spirit gave them language.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12–13)

God is in us to will to do His goodwill. He puts the desire in us to do His desire. That is what being *led by the Spirit* means.

Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

Jesus said:

But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:19–20)

We get the same thing in Psalm 37:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. (Psalm 37:23)

We walk and God steers us.

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

Three times we read, "*He makes my feet like the feet of deer*" (2 Samuel 22:34; Psalm 18:33; see also Habakkuk 3:19), which is what Isaiah 40:31 means, "*They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*"

God does not want us to be like gloves—lifeless and uselessly waiting to be picked up off the shelf. People pray, "Use me, O Lord," but they do nothing.

They have the idea that being used of God means being another Luther, Wesley, or Livingstone. But we are alive to get on with the task at hand. That is all important for us.

This is the important principle of faith. Christ Jesus is alive in me. Many wait for the Spirit to move, but they think He must move in the direction they want. But the moving of the Spirit is not just in our feelings. James 4:5 says, “*The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously.*” In other words, the Holy Spirit within us conflicts with our fleshly desires and emotions, urging us into service for Him.

Let us look at Ephesians 2:8, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” Faith is a mutual act between God and me. Two spirits are working in opposition, the spirit of the devil and the Spirit of God, and both are pressurizing us. First, we read of “*the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*” (Ephesians 2:2). Second, we read that when we are saved, “*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (verse 10). When we do His will and do His good works, it is by His grace. We cannot pride ourselves on it. The glory is all the Lord’s.

Perhaps you have noticed that Jesus never commended people, but He commended their faith. If you have small faith, do not worry; everybody starts with small faith—or with no faith at all! Even the apostles were called ones of little faith. If you are dissatisfied with yourself, remember that God made you that way. But “*The Spirit who dwells in us yearns*” (James 4:5), and He plans to strengthen you.

People Who Had a Faith Breakthrough

If you are a poor believer, you can get a faith breakthrough. The whole Bible is written to break down unbelief and to build up our fortifications of trust in God. We may study it intellectually for doctrine or for prophecy, but its central objective is to bring us the peace of perfect rest in God.

Here are a few breakthrough Bible verses. Pray as you read:

- “*It is high time to awake*” (Romans 13:11).
- “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2).
- “*Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would*

see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

- *“When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32).*
- *“Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Ephesians 5:14).*
- *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God” (James 2:23).*
- *“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).*

The Bible never apologizes for repeating the exhortation to *“trust in the Lord”* (Proverbs 3:5). Every day brings changes in circumstances, and every day we need a reminder to trust. Here are a few people from Scripture who had a faith breakthrough that brought God’s blessing to and through them. They awoke to God and dared the impossible.

Abraham. This pioneer of faith is called *“the father of all those who believe”* (Romans 4:11). *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God”* (James 2:23). Like everybody else, he could have doubted. His own wife, Sarah, laughed at the promise of God, thinking it absurd. Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees was in terrible spiritual shape, probably living in idolatry. Faith came to him quite late in life, but it made him the most dominant character the Middle East has ever known, except Christ.

Jacob. He was the grandson of Abraham. At the beginning, Jacob did not even claim he belonged to God. Then came a night when God wrestled with him, and Jacob experienced a breakthrough. It changed him so much that God changed his name to Israel. (See Genesis 32:28.)

Gideon. Gideon was a young and frustrated son of the local chief. He rose, literally overnight, to be a national leader. He began with very shaky faith, even complaining that God did nothing. God gently nursed Gideon’s faith until it was

mature. Then Gideon faced, unarmed, an invading army five hundred times bigger than his, and he “*became valiant in battle, [and] turned to flight the armies of the aliens,*” as the roll of honor in Hebrews 11:34 says. It was a classic operation of faith. (See Judges 7.)

Thomas the Twin, better known as Doubting Thomas. He actually said, “*I will not believe*” (John 20:25). He was of the kind who needs hard evidence, but even he experienced a faith breakthrough when He saw Jesus.

Seven downhearted disciples. Seven men met on the beach of Galilee. Every one of them had failed miserably. They had faith, they had performed miracles, and they had cast out demons, but now they were far from any such scene. Their spiritual career seemed to be finished. Then Christ came to them and recharged their batteries. (See John 21.) Soon they set out on a venture that changed the whole known world—and is now changing new worlds.

The Eye-opening Prayer

I wish people would be more exact when searching Scripture. Take Ephesians 1:17–19, where Paul prays for believers to experience a breakthrough:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Paul never prays for power—not here or anywhere else. And the New Testament never talks about a new infilling or another Pentecost, even if the convention speakers do. Paul prayed only: “*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*” (Ephesians 1:18); in other words, he prayed we would see the resources that lay at our very fingertips. We pray for power when Christ already has all power and has made His possession of power His Great Commission command. If *He* has all power, that is all that matters. It follows that as we obey His command, He will back us without us begging Him to do so. The power breakthrough for the Ephesians was a faith breakthrough; it came in the realization of what was theirs already in Christ. We take it by faith, not through merit by the labors of prayer.

We talk of “big believers” with “great faith.” But some event inspired and encouraged them into action. They took their opportunity, changed their attitude, and believed. God honors such a holy resolve. Jesus commended one or two for

their *great faith*, but not one of them arrived at that happy position by a long and arduous process. They met Jesus. That was all, and that was enough. Faith is just that—faith in Him. What Jesus commended was the quality of their faith, not its scope. Ever-increasing faith is not some kind of trapeze act. It is as a little child who trusts his parents more as he grows older.

The Bible tells us, “*The just shall live by faith*” (Galatians 3:11). Faith involves taking a chance; otherwise, it would not be faith. However, taking a chance on God is hardly a gamble. He is faithful and sure. Faith is confident anticipation based on the knowledge of who God is. Peter knew what Jesus was like and, therefore, obeyed His command to walk on the water. Faith is to act on the strength of what we know, expecting God to be to us what we know He is. When we risk everything on God, He proves to be faithful to what He has told us about Himself.

Leap into the Light

Every day we put our trust in countless things—in people, food, chairs, gadgets, everything. It is natural. We do not stand back and say, “Now, do I have enough faith to get on this bus?” “Can I sit quietly and trust this driver?” We never think of it; we just go along trusting all the way. Examining your feelings in order to see whether you have a bit of faith lurking around in some corner of your mind is quite absurd. You do not really feel faith. At least, faith and feelings do not always go together. You simply do what should be done while knowing you cannot succeed unless God helps you.

Faith is a leap into the light, not into the darkness. It is a leap out of the unknown and into the known, out of not knowing Christ Jesus into knowing Him. Believing means being like a child who stands where it is not safe, but without any fear, because his father is waiting to catch him. He falls on purpose to be caught.

Each of us is important to God. We are far more important to God than all the stars of space. He wants us to trust Him implicitly. He made us and will take pains with us. Faith allows Him to see us through until we rest in Him.

Luke 5:17–26 describes four men who had a literal breakthrough of faith. Christ was in a house crowded with Pharisees and teachers of the law, “*who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem*” (Luke 5:17). Obviously, many of them had physical troubles, and “*the power of the Lord was present to heal them*” (verse 17). But none of these religious people were healed. Then four men brought a paralyzed man on a stretcher, and because they could not get

through the crowd, they went up the outside stairs of the flat-roofed house, pulled apart the light coverings, and lowered the man down right in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus restored this man to health. It was a double breakthrough. They broke through the roof, and they broke through the unbelief of the crowd, which had kept them back from Christ.

That happens every time somebody is healed. It breaks through the unbelief of the world. It has to; otherwise we will never get near Jesus at all. Believe God! It will please some people and amaze everybody else. We are surrounded every day by doubters. Godlessness is the order of the day. Newspapers, radio, and television all push irreligion and godlessness down our throats for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. If we want faith, we should ditch all the rationalistic chaff and try a different diet. Feed on the Bible, prayer, Christian encouragement, and faith-building reading. Come hopefully, exercising faith, however nervously, and you will get more faith.

Believers are giants among pygmies. We are walking tall above the spiritual poverty of the world, because “*we are ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:20) to whom “*all authority has been given...in heaven and on earth*” (Matthew 28:18).

The loss of wealth is much;
the loss of health is more.
The loss of faith is such
that nothing can restore.

FAITH AND KNOWING

Faith in What?

If somebody is falling from an airplane, it would not be very helpful to shout, “Don’t be downhearted; just have faith!” A parachute would be more useful!

Some people talk about “having faith in the future.” Just believe tomorrow will be perfect and wonderful. Why? For no known reason. That is just being hopeful. It is very brave, because nobody knows why the future should be any better than the present. In fact, the present is not as good as the past in some ways. Faith is trust, but tomorrow is not something to trust. Tomorrow we will call today, just like today was tomorrow yesterday; it has not suddenly become brighter.

Some tell us to have “faith in life.” Creation is taken to be generally friendly. Life will treat us kindly. This is perhaps the common religion with no creed and nobody particularly to thank. It is not faith but simply a psychological attitude, optimism without any support. Neither the Bible nor science gives it much encouragement. The reality is that the vast universe is hostile to human life. We live in this air bubble in the vacuum of space on a planet full of life in a lifeless void. It is a daily miracle. Our preservation is an act of God’s goodness. It should encourage faith in Him, not in a kindly universe.

True faith means to place confidence in something. However, that does not mean anything at all will do—like a bed of nails! Whatever we trust must be trustworthy. Christian faith is faith in Christ, and that is not irrational.

Blind faith is careless and irresponsible, like putting your money into the hands of someone you know nothing about. A friend told me his Christian brother felt

sorry for people who had been in jail. He, therefore, employed men who had been in prison in order to give them a new start. He showed his confidence in one man by making him his general manager. Secretly, the man robbed him, and his thefts almost ruined the business. Later, he learned his “trusted” employee had been in prison for embezzlement! This is blind faith!

All over the world, people are putting faith in an endless variety of religions, systems, gods, theories, sects, cults, and self-proclaimed messiahs. Only a fool would trust an unknown deity. But then fools do, especially when techniques and strong emotional pressures are applied. Mass suicide has even been committed in their deluded hopes.

The vast majority of faiths, old and new, promise nothing this side of eternity; all they offer is “pie in the sky when you die.” The late Ayatollah Khomeini sent young teenagers into mined battlefields, promising that if they died killing infidels they would go straight to paradise. How can killing people make anybody fit for heaven? It is so grotesque and perverted; who would believe it? But it is an example of the deceitfulness of satanic influence. The Spanish Emperor at the time of the Inquisition was stricken with anxiety about his own salvation because he thought he had not burned enough Jews and others who were not Catholics!

Other faiths bring nothing like the common experience of Christian believers. In fact, they bring no real experience of God at all—no miracles, no forgiveness, no victory over sin, no strength in adversity, no peace with God, and no joy. Some of them produce resignation to fate as a great virtue. But Christianity does not. Christian believers overcome fate. They do not bow to the inevitable.

The theologies of most religions impose rules, prayers to pray, and practices to observe, and the only reward they offer is some kind of future hope. We may as well try to use a plank to cross the Atlantic as try to use untried religious systems to cross into eternity.

This is a day of suicidal fanaticism, violent assertion, screaming threats, and murder. Abraham, the father of three present-day religions, indulged in no raving demonstrations. In Christ’s day, there were those claiming to be children of Abraham who fumed with hate and wanted to kill Jesus. He said to them:

If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me....Abraham did not do this....You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning. (John 8:39–41, 44)

People who know the truth do not get into a demented rage. When critics arise, they let the truth prove itself. The very method of spreading Christian truth shows what kind of gospel it is; we do not use threats, swords, or intimidation. *“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1 Corinthians 1:21). The first Christians said, “We will conquer the world by love,” and they did.

Keeping an Open Mind

We are commonly told today to keep an open mind about religion and to never be dogmatic. That is the liberal view. It means, “you can never be sure.” What use is it then? Religion is supposed to assure us about the future and about God. If we keep an open mind about it, we brush aside all of Christ’s wonderful promises and enjoy nothing at all of what He guarantees. Christians do not keep an open mind. They embrace the positive blessings of Christ. Their minds are settled, not open. Some people act as if believing nothing for sure was a virtue! It certainly is not a virtue in an airplane pilot. How many would board an aircraft if the pilot kept an open mind about flying, the destination, and how to get there? Passengers want a very dogmatic pilot! He must be certain they will not end up dead! Keeping an open mind about our journey through life is equally perilous. What is our destination? We must know!

The Bible does not encourage anybody to be dogmatic, but its language is always that of a sure and certain hope. *“We know”* is a typical New Testament expression. Being sure is not being cocksure. Being sure that the sun will rise tomorrow makes us neither dogmatic nor overconfident. And such surety is the simple attitude of Christians, who are confident of tomorrow and of God. What He has done, He will do, and what He is, He will be. The common Christian testimony is that of the apostle Paul: *“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day”* (2 Timothy 1:12), or the day when Christ comes. That kind of certainty is no more than we would expect from any God worth calling God.

When Is Unbelief Forgivable?

Unbelief about God can be forgiven if people are ignorant about Him. The Bible itself says *“How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”* (Romans 10:14). But the ignorance may need forgiving. Considering that church spires are pointing upward at a hundred street corners, not hearing the gospel is unpardonable bigotry. How can God forgive people who will not even listen

after His Son died for their sins on the cross? “*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*” (Hebrews 2:1, 3). If we have truth without the truth of Christ, we die without the truth of forgiveness.

A bishop went for a haircut to a very talkative barber. Having the churchman captive in the chair for fifteen minutes, the barber saw his chance. Aggressively, he announced he was an unbeliever. The bishop then asked the barber, “Do you read the Bible?”

“Me, read the Bible? Of course not. I am an unbeliever.”

“Do you read religious Christian books?”

“You wouldn’t catch me reading that rubbish. I am an unbeliever I told you.”

“Do you ever go to church, listen to the radio, or watch any television about God?”

“I certainly do not!”

“Have you any Christian friends who tell you about their religious experiences?”

“No, thank you!”

“What about anybody coming from a church to talk to you?”

“These religion pushers know me! They dare not even knock at my door twice!”

The bishop waited, smiling.

“You understand now?” asked the barber.

“Perfectly!” answered the bishop. “I understand that you are *not an unbeliever at all.*”

The barber retorted, “I tell you, I believe nothing.”

The bishop asked, “You can’t be an unbeliever. You don’t even know what you are *not* believing. You can’t disbelieve what you’ve never heard. I’ll tell you what you are. You are a damned fool.”

The barber said, “Bishop, I’m surprised to hear you use language like that.”

The bishop replied, “I am not swearing. I am quoting the Bible. It says, ‘the fool says there is no God,’ and ‘God shall send them strong delusion that they all might be damned who believe not the truth.’ You are an ignoramus about God and a fool for not wanting to know. So you are damned already.”

We cannot get away with ignorance or unbelief. They both have effects. Faith in God brings obvious benefits. It switches the light on. Unbelief releases the acid of cynicism, so that people do not know what they believe. “*Even as they did not*

like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind” (Romans 1:28). We would do better to ignore creation rather than the Creator.

God Is Not Who Some Think He Is

Paul the apostle said, *“I know whom I have believed”* (2 Timothy 1:12). It was not just anybody. Paul hated Christ—until he met Him. Multitudes have been like that, not even looking for somebody to believe in, and then they met Jesus. They would not believe very much in anything otherwise. However, having met Him in some way, they find they have to believe in Him. It is easy *not* to believe in Jesus when you do not know Him. It takes no cleverness! But when Christ approaches or touches you, not believing is nearly impossible. No argument yet invented can nullify that experience.

The fact is that nobody can understand what it is like to meet Jesus until they do. Then they know why millions say as Paul, *“For me to live is Christ”* (Philippians 1:21), or as John, *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (John 17:3).

It has happened like that from the time He first appeared. The woman of Samaria described in John 4 met Jesus for five minutes and could not get over Him. She roused the whole town in her excitement, and then, when the men met Him, they felt the same way. They did not become religious enthusiasts. They stopped being religious enthusiasts and instead became followers of Jesus, the Savior of the world, as they called Him. Modern Christians are like that, too. They have found Him—the One who should come, whose presence makes heaven the place that it is.

Only God Can Reveal God

Unless God allowed it, we could never know Him. Only God can reveal God. Great thinkers cannot. Many have spun God out of their rational thoughts, but their projections are about as heart-warming as an iceberg. Scholars have worked on Jesus in the same way. They veil His face with unbelief and then call Him, *“The Man nobody knows.”* They strip Him of what He is and then wonder what He is. They deny His miracles and His resurrection and reduce Him to their own eye-level. He is too big for their logic, so they present Him as a miniature Jesus.

Nobody knows that Jesus. We know the Jesus whose face is the glory of God. It is a fact that human imagination is very limited and cannot reach God. We can only imagine something as good as what we know, not better. False gods are made in the image of men or women. *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have*

entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The experience of Christ is beyond those who are strangers to it.

Isaiah mocked those who tried to make images of their gods. Images are like gargoyles. A block of wood cannot become like the Creator of heaven and earth. The character of such “gods” is usually as distorted as their appearance. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were lustful and treacherous. The early American tribes worshipped deities that demanded human sacrifices, until the temple walls were coated inches thick with dried blood.

The science fiction ideas of other forms of life are usually ghastly, nightmarish figures, and their otherworld scenes make New York or London look like paradise in comparison. Every human attempt to portray God comes up against the depravity of the human mind.

In the same vein are the curious ideas circulating about heaven and how to get there. Our only ideas come from the Bible, and only the Bible has the right to tell us how to get there or who will get there. The Bible itself describes heaven as a place where only those cleansed in the blood of Jesus can enter.

If we turn elsewhere to know God, we feel depressed. The sacred writings of India, China, or Islam bring fear but little cheer. But open the Bible, and a thousand rainbows of wonderful light stream out. The more we understand that Book, the more our minds open to its revelations, as flowers to the rising sun. The power that inspired it designed our souls to receive it.

Revelation

The Creator who cares enough to let this human race continue obviously does not want to leave us in the dark about Himself. He reveals Himself. That is the only way we could know Him. Our hard reasoning is like flint that only makes sparks, not light. As Isaiah 50:11 says:

Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—this you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment.

Sparks, flashes of thought, do not illumine life’s path very much. The philosophers are as lost as anybody, and yet they seek to guide us—the blind leading the blind. God says, “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1:3). He brought light to Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and ultimately He brought light to the entire world through Jesus Christ.

The Bible Paradox

Too many toss the Bible out of the window without realizing what damage they do. The Bible is dynamite. Scripture is unexplored territory to many, although “*the gold of that land is good*” (Genesis 2:12). To unfasten the clasps of the Bible and turn these healing leaves, we need the fingers of faith. Yet “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17). God gives us faith to read it so we can gather faith—if we want it.

To get faith to read the Word, just read it. It is self-proving. Its chemistry explodes and brings us confidence about itself. “*Hearing you will hear*” (Matthew 13:14). Abraham believed God when He spoke. And the Creator has fitted each one of us with the power to recognize His voice, just as Abraham did.

FAITH AND THE PROMISES

Faith, an Attitude

What is this faith? It is not a thing, a lump of something, an extra brain lobe, or a piece stuck on our souls. We choose to believe. The notable woman of Shunem provides an excellent example. With Elisha, she believed and refused every discouragement. She was unwavering. Her character of unshakable, fearless trust in God is why the Bible tells her story.

Faith is the only basis possible for any workable relationship with Almighty God. It seems to me that faith in God is not only good, but it is the only decent thing to do. It is ridiculous to expect dealings with God on any other terms. Faith is the only way an invisible God can relate to us. It is the only way we can properly face the unknown future. If we cannot embrace faith, what are we worth? If we cannot trust the Almighty, who do we think we are? It is the least God can expect. *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). If anybody says, “I am not a great believer,” that is too bad. The reality is, God is not pleased with them. Would they or anybody else be pleased if somebody did not trust them?

Faith is not certainty. It is a personal issue. Somebody may have proven himself or herself up to now, but the future holds only personal assurances. We trust certain people because we know them. If we thought these people would change, we would not trust them. We read in the Bible who God is, and we may have proven Him for ourselves in our own lives, yet for the future, we still must trust.

No faith is needed to believe two plus two make four, but life is a degree more complicated. Circumstances change like the ocean. The vastness of things affects

the future. Obviously, what God might do is affected, but He does not cut across events as if they did not occur. He is all-wise and all-powerful, so much so that we have to leave things to Him to sort out. We may not understand what He is doing any more than we would understand the chaos of a shipyard building a 50,000-ton luxury liner. We look to Him, and that is something God takes into account. He made the world that way. Prayer and faith will enable Him to do what He could not otherwise do. No doubt it is true that God can do anything, but He does not work apart from those who believe. That is His planned providence.

Divine Promises

It is human nature to depend on people's promises until we are disillusioned. Tricksters and conmen depend on this innate trust in people who give us their word. We should be able to trust Almighty God, as He has given us His Word. A hundred generations have proven Him to be reliable, and He has given us all the same reason for relying on Him—express declarations of what He will do for us. Somebody went through the whole Bible and found a total of 7,874 promises that God had made to us.

That glittering array of promises covers our understanding of God and what we can expect of Him. Provisions outside these promises are possibly outside the word of God, yet there is no hard boundary to the kindness of God. He is gracious. Experience shows He may allow us to go beyond the fringe of His precise Word. When that happens, it is not to be taken as setting a precedent for others to demand the same of Him. But the scope of 7,874 promises should be wide enough for all the circumstances in our lives in need of God's help. Many of God's promises come in the form of a covenant.

Solicited and Unsolicited

God does a lot for us without us needing to ask Him. *"Your Father in heaven... makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:45). God is good, and good to all. Millions give Him no credit, though they are quick to blame Him when things go wrong. The processes of nature seem unchangeable and regular. To this day, nobody has shown that God has no part in this. He keeps His promises to *"the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth"* (Genesis 9:10). *"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease"* (Genesis 8:22). Jesus took it farther and included the flowers, saying,

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28–29).

However, God has other good things. The promise is, *“Seek and you will find”* (Matthew 7:7), for they are obtainable only by direct application. Actually, they are promised, and most of them are listed in Scripture—*“No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly”* (Psalm 84:11). When we come to the end of natural provision, Jesus said, *“Ask and you will receive”* (John 16:24).

Everyone who asks receives...If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. (Matthew 7:8, 11)

If we ask for good, He will not send evil—ever! *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights”* says James 1:17.

The exercise of faith in prayer is a healthy activity. The bird in the nest must learn to fly and gather what is available. Having to ask is an excellent reminder to us of our dependency on God, and prayer is designed to bring us to seek Him. It gives birth to a spirit of childlikeness, causing us to look to our heavenly Father at all times. It is fellowship—family fellowship with our Father.

World Order Prayer

God could have arranged to do everything for us, but the simplest understanding of human nature would laugh at the suggestion. No parents would be so stupid as to treat their offspring like that. The object is to lead a child to stand on his own two feet. God intends something very similar for us. His ultimate purpose is that we will not be just helpless dependants, like babes at the breast, but His co-workers.

Prayer is, at present, our sole access if we wish to be useful to Him. It is so often forgotten that He actually created the kind of world in which prayer would be necessary. Prayer was not an afterthought when the devil upset things. Even Jesus prayed. To help the ongoing affairs of the kingdom of God, prayer is essential. A lot goes on that God does not want, but we should pray for His will to be done. We ask, and then He performs. He planned that we should cooperate in that way, just as He put Adam *“in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it”* (Genesis 2:15).

That is how to read the promise in John 14:13: *“Whatever you ask in My name,*

that I will do.” We ask for whatever is necessary for the will of God on earth to be fulfilled. *“Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do.”* We are His collaborators. The world and the people in it need care, and the promise that Christ will do whatever we ask is for the fulfillment of that purpose, not to get the moon or half a dozen Rolls Royce cars.

God has made some unconditional promises, like the continuation of nature, but to receive many of His promises, we must ask. James 4:2 says, *“You do not have because you do not ask.”* He is not going to wet nurse us. God feeds the sparrows, but He does not throw food into their nests. If we want God to work, we must work in prayer.

God Always Guides

Prayer is the act of speaking to God, not God speaking to us. God speaks to us anytime He wants. He does not wait until we pray. In fact, nobody in the Bible seemed to be praying when God spoke to them. God is close to us and can speak at all times. It may be that we cannot hear Him sometimes because we are clamoring for Him to say something different.

Prayer is basically a time to pour out our hearts to Him. Listening is another thing. We should constantly be ready, for He speaks at any time. It is no use rising from our knees and saying He has not spoken. We cannot demand that He should speak at that precise time, like switching on the radio. We should never be switched off. He may interrupt our own program with specific personal instructions at any time.

Dangers

It may seem strange to Christians today that there is nothing whatever in Scripture about praying in order to hear from God—for guidance or anything else. There is plenty about hearing His voice but almost nothing about waiting to hear (except in Habakkuk 2:1, where Habakkuk stood at his watch to hear from God). If we pray and wait to hear, we may hear, but whatever voice speaks, we need to know who it is. The dangers are obvious.

It is a psychological fact of our nature that our own desires can be so loud that they sound like divine commands. Shout long enough about what we already want to do, and the echo will come back sooner or later, but it is our own voice, not the voice of God. People talk of how they wrestled with God over a decision. Looked at honestly, that is an invidious procedure. Is God like that? In fact, they are wrestling with their own will, not God. They want Him to agree. Do we

really imagine we must wrestle with God in order to pry the secret out of Him about what He wants us to do? Surely He would just tell us without an all-out wrestling match with the Almighty. It is ridiculous to approach God that way, as if He was unwilling to tell us His will. The business of asking God for directions suggests that He has neglected to guide us as He said He would.

After Jerusalem fell, many of the people wanted Jeremiah to ask God if they should leave the land. In their hearts, they wanted to go to Egypt and intended to do so. They only wanted Jeremiah to persuade God to approve their plans. Jeremiah inquired, and God did not approve at all. They went anyway, saying Jeremiah had lied about what God said, and they ran into great trouble as a result. God had not said anything about them leaving in the first place because He did not have a new plan.

Fortunately, we have a safeguard for all voices and impulses—the Word. *“If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”* (Isaiah 8:20). It claims for itself the unique privilege of being the means through which God speaks. He has nothing to say except according to its precepts. His Word may come to us through ministry or prophecy, which often we need, but personal directives never come through a third party. He tells nobody else what you should do. There may be comfort, edification, and exhortation, but each of us is personally led by God if we are His children. (See Romans 8:14.)

None of the great men and women in Scripture who heard God’s voice for themselves were asking and waiting for it. God wanted to speak and did so. People ask, “What is God saying to the church?” Why should God always be saying something to the church? Has He left us all in the dark about what He wants? There are spiritually superior people who profess to know what nobody else knows, as if they were divine favorites who really stood before Him as nobody else. The Spirit of the prophets is now the Spirit given to all believers. God reveals His secrets to His prophets, and we are all in that category today in Christ. When God speaks, it is a broadcast message, not a telephone call.

What God Is Saying

If He has anything to say to the church as a whole, it is what Christ said when He left this world: *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). Until that commission is completed, God has no afterthoughts for overriding concerns to get us busy about side issues, such as church structures and organization.

God has a revealed will. So, *“this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if*

we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). That is why Christ gave us the petition, *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). Jesus said again, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you”* (John 15:7). The primary aim of prayer is not to make sure our will is done but to bring about the revealed will of God; in other words, it is not for the purpose of persuading God to our way of thinking or forcing His hand. His expressed will is that He desires all men to come to repentance. Everything in the New Testament spells that out clearly. If we ask according to that will, God hastens to answer. This is expressed in the prayer, *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). It is the gospel that will achieve it.

Fasting and Faith

We have heard of those who say they will fast, till death if necessary, until God answers them. It certainly is an impressive way of showing how sincere they are. But how is this supposed to affect God? Is it a sign of their patience and faith that God will speak? Or are they trying to force the hand of God by a subtle spiritual threat? Is it religious and emotional blackmail? Is God going to say, “I had better do what they want, or they will die?”

God does not yield to emotional pressures of any kind. It is an error to fast in order to twist God’s arm. Fasting is just a manner of expressing our urgency, like calling on God loudly or persistently. The pagans thought they could bring some kind of force to bear upon their gods by their exertions, bloodletting, and other efforts. But the Lord is not like Zeus, Apollo, or Baal. God delights in hearing His children, and we do not need to make noise or put on a demonstration to get His attention. Getting everybody on earth to pray in an effort to add weight or volume to our voice is like sending a petition to the government, and it totally misunderstands the nature of prayer. Prayer is effective when we are participating in the work of God, especially a particular work.

In order to believe God when we ask, we must know we are heard and that we are asking according to His Word—namely, according to His revealed will. The Word of God lists many such objects. We are told to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matthew 6:11). Jesus said, *“How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him”* (Luke 11:13). He also said, *“Tarry...until you are endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). We should ask for healing, for spiritual gifts, for one another, for those in the assembly who sin, and for kings and governors. These are all subsidiary requests heading up

the greatest purpose of God, the world's redemption.

Faith and Its Objectives

James was the half-brother of Jesus, and his epistle carries us back to the typical teaching of Jesus as no other book. Here is a valuable passage:

You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures...friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:2–4)

The discussion there concerns prayer for material goods. But if we pray as materialists of the world and our hearts are wrong, we will get no answer. To set our affection on possessions, affluence, and prestige is materialism and worldliness, which push God and His purposes aside.

The number one prayer of many people is about number one, themselves. But when the kingdom of God is number one, there is no wrong in asking God for His good things. James 1:17 says that *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”* The material gifts around us are from God as gifts to His creatures. *“He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness”* (Psalm 107:9), whatever their instincts or tastes.

God-made wealth gives us the power to get wealth, but nothing whatever was made only for materialists. Wealth is not the primary object of faith. Faith has been given to us so we can lay hold of possessions. God did not display His vast wealth in our wonderful world just as a temptation to test Christians. Believers have as much claim on the good things of this life as anyone else. However, to concentrate our desires and prayers on them is a different matter. The motive for getting is giving—to relieve the hungry and distressed and to make the name of the Lord known.

In summary, faith and prayer are a single subject, fully dependent upon one another.

FAITH, OLD AND NEW

Faith in the Old Testament

We get what we live for, but do we live by what we get? Conditions in our modern world are fantastic compared to the past. Are we fantastically more content and fulfilled?

Fantastic people throughout history—people often called spiritual giants, like Enoch, Abraham, and Samuel—have relished mortal existence like the finest wine, even when ignorance was profound. They did not surf the Internet, skimming across world knowledge, but below the surface they plummeted the depths of reality. A deep understanding burned in their eyes. If we met one of these tremendous characters, we would feel inferior in the presence of greatness.

These were the ancients, men who knew God. They did not consider the word *faith* as a state of mind. They thought only in practical terms, such as walking with God, serving, fearing, obeying, and cleaving to Him. That is what faith is, and that is why the Bible must be our guide every inch of the way. Today, faith is thought of as a possession to be stacked safely somewhere in our psychological cupboard. We bring it out, dust it off, and exhibit it, as occasion requires. *Credo*—I believe.

The saints of old would no more go through the day without faith than without their clothes. It was the atmosphere they breathed, not just for the convenient moments. The world now thinks of religion as a subject or as an occasional practice. Sunday is given for religion. But for these great men of old, relationship with God was the essential quality of all their waking hours. Life was unthinkable without Him.

The world of the Old Testament was a perilous place. The nations had no idea

how to handle sicknesses, plagues, droughts, and famines. Enemies surrounded them. But Israel learned God was their *El Shaddai*—their all-sufficient protector, deliverer, healer, and stronghold, their “*shield and buckler*” (Psalm 91:4).

Other nations looked to their gods—to the rain god if they wanted rain, to the god of fertility for their harvest. They offered a sacrifice at the shrine to bribe the gods when they wanted their help. That was all the gods asked for; otherwise, people forgot them. Pagans had no sustained sense of God’s constant concern. Only Israel enjoyed that.

In Israel, God sent the prophets to assure them of His faithfulness. He was their shepherd, and they were the sheep of His pasture. This was far beyond heathen thought. Even the greatest of the heathens, such as Socrates and Aristotle, had no such divine awareness. Israel was the people of God. By comparison, though the Ephesians gloried in Diana (Artemis), they were not “the people of Diana.” They just patronized her.

Faith of a New Kind

In the New Testament, the trust communicated by the prophets continues. But it expands beyond a physical covenant and takes in more than even the prophets who prophesied it understood. (See 1 Peter 1:10–12.) What Christ introduced embraced life here and hereafter—our whole moral, spiritual, and psychological existence.

Jesus showed us that our physical dangers are not the all-important matter, nor our material prosperity. The state of our real self, our personality or soul, was the all important issue. The body would die, but it would be far worse for the soul to perish. In the Old Testament, the people learned, “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4), but Jesus said the soul who sins is dead already. And then He presented Himself as the Resurrection and the Life.

The first thought of the ancients had to be physical security and prosperity, because they lived under threat against both. But they were wonderful believers. Their faith was not an easy-going belief in a creed; it had to be exercised vigilantly as a daily shield against constant perils. They pioneered true faith in a world that was entirely idolatrous. Whatever we trust God for, including eternal salvation, these old characters, under the most testing conditions, showed us how to believe. Their examples are recorded in Scripture because they afford vital guidance for all time.

Faith comes in various degrees. We may begin with a limited vision of what to trust God for, or we may come with only one prayer, “O God, help me!” I want

to help people go up a faith staircase, step by step, looking to God for an ever-wider area of their circumstances. Faith may follow a process something like this:

1. Believing something is true. The book of James reminds those who believe in one God that the devils also believe in Him (see James 2:19), which is not too encouraging! In John 11, Martha believed in the resurrection at the last day, but Christ wanted a faith that leaped to resurrection there and then. But it was a beginning. Likewise, the Jews believed their religion was true, but it did little for them because it was never in action. It is similar today. Faith may be no more than agreement with a statement of truth, an intellectual assent; such faith is the small change of life's currency. Believing God exists is not saving faith any more than believing in the existence of a planet called Pluto, but it is an essential start.

2. Believing a person is genuine. For example, Nicodemus said, "*You are a teacher come from God*" (John 3:2). Jesus wanted a higher brand of faith; He wanted to be believed in as more than a teacher. He talked to Nicodemus about believing in a new way, a way Nicodemus had never conceived. Many believed in Jesus as Nicodemus did, as a genuine man. And admiration can turn to commitment, as we may reasonably think it did for Nicodemus. However, the belief in Jesus as a good man suffers from a fatal fallacy. If He was good, then He must not have been a liar, a deceiver, or crazy man. Yet He claimed to be the Son of God. He was not a good man to claim such a thing; such a claim would make Him a shocking blasphemer—unless it was true. If He was a good man, He must have been what He said—much more than a good man. He must have been the Christ, the Savior of the world. And He is!

3. Believing in Jesus as an inspired person, like a prophet. The disciples told Jesus the people thought of Him as a prophet: "*Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets*" (Matthew 16:14). When He entered Jerusalem, "*the multitudes said, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee'*" (Matthew 21:11). They applauded Him, but Jesus, like Jeremiah, wept. They had gone so far but not allowed Him to take them under His wing and save them. Again, we cannot say He was a prophet like we say Sir Christopher Wren was an architect. A prophet must be heard, and if we hear Christ, it will take us a long, long way.

4. Believing in God's power. In Jerusalem, everybody believed in His power. Many believed also in Christ's powers. (See John 2:23–25.) They did not doubt what they saw—that He had healing power and was a miracle-worker. They

even wanted to make Him king. But Christ wanted a broader faith. They believed in His physical powers but did not place Him where He should be, as Lord and Savior. They asked Him for miracles, but He wanted to do something other than gratify their love of the sensational. (See John 6:36.) Their faith was only in Him as a healer, which is worth little more than faith in a man as a doctor, driver, or even a plumber. We trust a doctor as a doctor only, not as a daily help. Christ is to be trusted for all things, not just for a miracle or two.

5. Believing as trust. This turns faith into a personal relationship. We trust people, such as our parents. They know us and hold the key to our most confidential diary. We feel they will not fail us. That is the personal faith God wants us to place in Him. Our lives are as open to Him as if He sat in our living room. We may as well confess our sins, as He knows them anyway. That is saving faith. If we were trapped on a mountain ledge and an expert rescuer came, we would simply have to put our lives in his hands, no matter how brilliant, rich, strong, or stupid we were. That is saving faith, and Christ is our Rescuer.

6. Believing in Christ. This is the real faith. We trust Christ in a way that is deeper than our trust in even our closest friends. Friends can let us down, as in Psalm 41:9: *“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* Even our own fathers may fail us, but *“when my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me”* (Psalm 27:10). It means surrender, letting Him take over—not just in one area of our lives but over our whole lives. If He is going to keep your head above water, He has to get a grip on you completely.

That is how Paul wanted it to be for his converts. *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Christ can only save what we give to Him. We must hand everything over to Him—lock, stock, and barrel; body, soul, and spirit—giving ourselves into His total care for all time. Then He can do something for us. He does not want to save us piecemeal. Satan is the only rival for that kind of possession of us. He is hungry for it, because he wants to *devour* us.

Effects of True Faith

I have been looking for a word, and it is *interaction* or perhaps *catalyst*—a word indicating an effect. That is what faith does; it produces an interaction between Christ and me. It is also a catalyst, an element bringing about a change. Believing is a relationship. I do not mean like being related to your great-aunt

whom you have never met. It is something alive and vibrant that affects both Christ and me. We give ourselves to Him, and He gives Himself to us. We become “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4).

The apostle Paul also looked for a word for the same situation. He uses a marvelous expression for it—“*in Christ*.” For example, “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and “*there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). The simplest faith in Christ has this amazing effect. All true faith is simple anyway. It is not some kind of algebra to find the value of X. The simplest person can believe and enjoy the same effect as the wisest.

Christ’s “Faith” Expressions

Jesus also looked for words. He heard all the religious jargon of the scribes, which ordinary people did not appreciate. But the common people heard Jesus gladly. He talked about faith but put it in other ways. *Come to Me. Love Me. Abide in Me. Follow Me.*

Faith is not one particular religious act. It is the transfer of responsibility for our lives to God *in total* when our own resources are inadequate. It is spiritual fusion, making us one with Christ. It seems such a simple attitude, and it is. Yet there is no other way by which we can possibly acquire all Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. We are saved by faith alone. What is greater than that in this world? The hymn calls it: “Faith, mighty faith.” It is mighty because it is the gift of God.

PART 4

FAITH OF ABRAHAM (PART 1)

The Fight of Faith

Historians have listed the ten most world-changing battles, yet it can be rightly said that the greatest of them was fought in the heart of Abraham. Those who think of Abraham as just a biblical character have not even begun to understand the world in which they live. The Bible names Abraham 309 times, but because of his faith, his name is inscribed upon the whole of the Middle East and upon world history to this day. He was the first man noted for the “obedience of faith,” and his career was consistent with his faith. “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*” (Romans 4:3). What is of faith is forever.

Faith changes people who change the world. Abraham was the man who began the civilizing process fifteen hundred years before the Greeks and Romans. The Pharaohs were in Egypt one thousand years before Abraham and continued another two thousand years after him, but they affected the world less than he did. The Pharaohs left no moral mark and only cluttered the desert sands with colossal monuments to their own egos. Abraham left not one physical trace behind him for us to see, but all our lives today—religious or not—are different because of who he was.

Faith, Not Religion

Abraham was not deeply religious. He was not even religious in our modern sense. He had no creed, no hymns, no Bible, no images, and no theology. He probably did not really know much about God, but he knew God personally and very well. He walked with God.

For this patriarch, God was not a go-to-church-once-a-week obligation, pushed into the spare corner of life. He had no church to attend. He did not believe God

just to be faithful to tradition, because there was no tradition. God was simply his way of life.

Why Believe?

Abraham did not believe in order to save his own soul. His faith was neither a ticket for a joy ride to heaven nor an insurance policy to escape hell. We do not know what he thought about the afterlife. He came from Ur of the Chaldees and knew their pagan myths. But Abraham was starting on a new learning course, and his tutor was the Lord. While the nations developed crude and cruel superstitions for themselves, Abraham threw himself upon God. For him, to carry on without God was simply unthinkable.

Abraham believed God for two reasons. First, he found out a living God existed. Second, the only sensible thing to do was to obey what that God said. Abraham's faith changed the future, but that is not why he believed. He never dreamed of any such mission. In fact, he forsook the world and got as far away as he could from the world as he knew it. He changed it by leaving it. He believed God simply because God was there. Such faith must still be the most rational thing anybody can ever do.

Toward Civilization

Astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon on July 20, 1969, saying his one small step was a giant leap for mankind. Far bigger for mankind was the step Abraham took when he left Ur of the Chaldees and became the pioneer of walking by faith in God.

Abraham began life in wealthy Ur of the Chaldees and then moved to Haran, which was still in the Fertile Crescent. After that, he sacrificed his fine dwelling for a black goatskin tent in the wild moorland scrub of the Negev. He moved around only with his family, who were shepherds and cattlemen, like a Bedouin sheikh. Secretly in his heart, he nourished the ideal of a new way of life. "*He waited for the city which has foundations*" (Hebrews 11:10).

Intellectualism

Abraham was not an intellectual, but "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Psalm 111:10). Men of genius would burst upon the world scene in the distant future. They would cast their nets of thought far and wide, seeking knowledge and understanding. They would invent new ways to live and new ways to rule. But they were destined never to know what Abraham knew. Their searching minds missed the ultimate discovery—the personal knowledge of God.

Paul said, *“In the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God”* (1 Corinthians 1:21). Their confession of failure was carved in stone upon an altar in Athens—to the unknown god. (See Acts 17:23.)

God would never wish to be unknown. Abraham had picked up a golden key marked “faith,” And with it he opened heaven. Men of genius are as rare as icicles in summer. Abraham was not one of them. God is not the chairman of an exclusive club for intellectuals, but He keeps His front door open for anybody. He would never deprive Himself of the love of the millions in preference to the one-in-a-million prodigy.

The suggestion that we must not believe if men of intellect do not is not a very intellectual notion. If we had to find Him via a labyrinth of learning, He would have a very small company around Him. To gain the love of the vast mass of mankind, He needed to use a different means. Thus, He makes Himself known to all who look up to Him in childlike hope.

The Way

Abraham learned to trust God, and it revealed to him the paths of peace. In his day, cities were founded on bloodshed and existed by military might. God gave Abraham a new vision of a city of peace, *“whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). His eyes scanned far horizons indeed. He was the first to discern the paths of righteousness—paths *in the sea* and ways in the wilderness.

The paths of righteousness and peace have been found. They are marked and known. Used or not, they can now never be forgotten. They exist forever as freeways open for all. Many nations claim to follow them, but it is only feebly. If we traced these ideals of peace and righteousness back in time, they would bring us to the tent door of Abraham, where God said to him, *“Walk before Me and be blameless”* (Genesis 17:1).

Solid Ground

The book of Hebrews sums up the goal of Abraham’s life, saying *“He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). In his day, nobody knew of any spiritual foundations. Rulers ruled only for their own benefit. Before Abraham, people’s heads were vacant of any purpose or plan. Nobody knew why they were on earth.

Paul faced the agnostics and Stoics of Athens and said, *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). Therefore, he wrote to Timothy, *“Our Savior Jesus Christ...has*

abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

In Romans 1:22, Paul also talks about those who *“professing to be wise... became fools.”* We may live without knowing the distance to the nearest star or the secrets of the atom. But there is no real life at all without the secret of God. We are lost before we start. Agnosticism is total disaster. We either live by faith or we do not live at all. Jesus said, *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:36). Faithless life is lifeless life. Abraham knew very little about the world around him, but he knew what life was all about. God made the first man, Adam, and the first civilized man, Abraham.

Why God Spoke

We first find Abram (later renamed Abraham by Almighty God in Genesis 17:5) in Ur of the Chaldees with his father Terah. Ur, like all cities, had an official god, and families had a shrine for their own household god, as in India today. However, a “most high God” was also acknowledged. Abram heard His voice. It was a divine breakthrough.

This breakthrough came from God’s side, not Abraham’s. God broke through to him, and by doing so, He showed His concern for the world. When nobody sought Him, He sought them. Abraham was not seeking God. Probably nobody was. But God revealed Himself to Abraham and gave him a simple instruction—to leave Ur. God didn’t tell Abraham where to go; nevertheless, Abraham set off. Thus began his unforgettable life of faith. Hebrews 11:8–10 describes it:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

This passage stresses the fact that Abraham lived in tents, away from houses and streets. He did this in order to flush paganism, city manners, and immoral customs out of his system. Abraham was born and bred in an idolatrous civilization, and God needed to purge him of everything except what He showed him. God showed him he had a destiny beyond his own interests, a destiny that would affect the future of nations. He was the first man of a New World order. God said:

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2–3)

In Abraham's time, people everywhere lived for themselves, usually by fighting everybody else. One day, the nations will be judged. In Matthew 25, Christ painted a picture of a vast drama on the stage of the whole universe: the Parable of the Judgment of the Nations, where each must give account. God's eyes of concern run through the whole earth. Why do we have faith? Is it to bless ourselves or to get wealth and be prosperous? If we have such faith, God gave it. But He enriches us to enrich others, to pass it on. Politicians produce manifestos and agendas to look after their own corner of the world, but what is the purpose of the nation? Is it simply to exist, with no moral aims? Individuals also have their own agendas, but what about their life purpose? Abraham lived for God.

Faith, the Divine Passport

God planted Abraham in an unfriendly wilderness; God also planted the church in an unfriendly world and gave us the same purpose He gave Abraham. When Jesus sent out His disciples, He gave them a divine passport into every land on earth. *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). Christ was following the will of His Father, as expressed to Abraham, *"I will bless...and you shall be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:2–3). People could forget about saving themselves; He would look after that. Their concern must be the salvation of humankind.

The Great Commission commits us to a mission that continues Christ's mission. It is the reason for a church, and it gives the church the right to exist. If we are concerned only with ourselves, the church is purposeless in God's eyes and harmless to hell. Faith only operates when linked with His purposes, and the first of them is to bless all the families of the earth.

Faith's Final Test

The strangest episode in Abraham's life was his call to sacrifice Isaac.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Hebrews 11:17–19)

It might shock us that Abraham would even contemplate human sacrifice. The four thousand years distance makes it impossible for us to understand a man of his time. Human sacrifice was common in that day and continued to be practiced even three thousand years after Abraham in some parts of the world, such as Central America. Abraham was the learner and beginner of faith in God. Spiritual lessons percolate very slowly into our human understanding.

God never meant Isaac to be sacrificed, but God tested Abraham on his own cultural level. Such a practice was then an expression of extreme religious devotion. He learned, in fact, that God wanted no offering of human blood. The purpose of this episode was the same as all God was doing with Abraham, to create a new culture in which bloodshed had no place.

From Abraham, this revelation passed into the Hebrew tradition while everyone around them continued such sacrifices. And when Israel fell away from faith in the Lord, they reverted back to barbarity. Jeremiah 32:35 says:

They built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

The voice of God at the most dramatic moment stopped Abraham's hand. He had exhibited incredible faith, because he fully expected Isaac would be the father of generations and nations. To be willing (right or wrong) to sacrifice him showed staggering trust in the Lord. As we read in Hebrews, he believed God could raise his only son, Isaac, from the dead if necessary.

Hyphenated Name

It was not uncommon then for men to use the name of their god as part of their own name. But the Lord changed Abram's name:

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him....No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. (Genesis 17:1, 5)

However, something else also happened that was far more significant. God took Abraham's name as part of His name! He called Himself the *God of Abraham*. The Almighty identified Himself with a man.

It meant the reputation of God rested on Abraham. What God was like—a new God to the world in general—would be assumed from what Abraham was like. God risked His name by joining it with Abraham. Abraham believed in the Lord,

and the Lord believed in Abraham. Something similar is reflected in what Jesus said in Matthew 10:32, “*Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.*”

That is the inner truth about faith. Its primary purpose is not merely getting things or doing things or being something. It relates us to God. Faith is fellowship, and it is always the condition for our relationship with God. He puts faith in our hearts, and then He puts His faith in us to do His will. It is *the faith of God*.

Unless that faith is there, God has no faith in us. That is how it appears from John 2:23–24, “*Many believed in His name...but Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.*” The words “*commit Himself*” are the same as *believe*. Their faith was not right, and Jesus knew it. But when faith is right, Jesus does commit Himself to us. Imagine that! Christ comes to us in trust! The whole business of God’s promises, dealings, association, and relations with us becomes possible once this mutual trust is established. We had better remember it! If Jesus identifies Himself with us and says, “I am the Jesus of Reinhard Bonnke” or “I am the Jesus of Anni Bonnke!” we had better act like it!

Abraham was what God made him, a credit to this day, and God was what Abraham made Him appear to be. Despite Abraham’s imperfections, as a child of his times in many ways, God shone through Abraham’s life as a God worth knowing. Abraham was who he was because of who his God was—His qualities, values, greatness, virtues. God did not choose Abraham because of Abraham’s perfection but because of His own. And God transmitted who He was to Abraham through his faith. The process that began in Eden was restarted with Abraham, and once again God was making man in His own image.

Faith exists so the process may continue. “*We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2).

FAITH OF ABRAHAM (PART 2)

War Booty

When Abraham began the life of a tent dweller, a petty king plagued the countryside. He was an adventurer chief called Chedorlaomer, akin to a Mafia godfather. For twelve years, he extorted tribute—a kind of protection racket—from the little nearby communities. Eventually, five city-states rebelled against Chedorlaomer and his supporting chieftains, but it only provoked him to worse deeds. This gangster-like crew set out on a wholesale plundering expedition. In his rampage, he overwhelmed Sodom, Gomorrah, Zeboim, and Bela, the notorious cities of the plain.

Now Lot, the nephew of Abraham, lived at Sodom. He, his wife, and his married daughters were all taken captives, and the raiders stole everything they had. Abraham heard this and decided to do something about it. He had made friends with strong-armed leaders in the area, and they joined him. Together they represented a well-trained and substantial private force. They pursued the plundering chiefs in a well-organized rescue operation. Under Abraham's leadership, they overthrew Chedorlaomer and his whole gang and brought back the captives unharmed, as well as everything they had pillaged and more beside as compensation booty.

The king of Sodom himself was rescued. Then he had the audacity to tell Abraham how to distribute the proceeds of the battle! He wanted the people who had been captives and told Abraham to keep the booty for himself, as spoils of war.

That king was about to hear something new. Abraham, the conqueror, said, “I

will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap” (Genesis 14:23). He did not want anybody to say the Sodomites had made him rich. God had shown him the city he looked for, which God would build, and therefore, he would not enrich himself at the expense of others. Abraham had seen a better way.

Cities lived by destroying cities, looting the harvests and wealth, and using captives as slaves. The whole idea of military strength was to plunder. For example, Judges 5 gives the account of the Canaanite uprising against Israel, which Deborah subdued. It describes the mother of the Canaanites leaning out of the window and being told, “*Are they not finding and dividing the spoil: to every man a girl or two; for Sisera, plunder of dyed garments, plunder of garments embroidered and dyed, two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?*” (Judges 5:30). When Abraham rejected the practice, it baffled the greed of the king of Sodom.

Abraham knew he had acted as God’s servant, and he felt no need to deduct his own salary from the results. God confirmed His approval. “*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward’*” (Genesis 15:1). Abraham believed God. He knew, with such a God on his side, he did not need to kill, slaughter, and strip other people of their possessions in order to enrich himself. God would look after him. In fact, God did and very well indeed.

Abraham’s faith had led him to two new principles:

First, the strong should help the weak, not take advantage of them.

Second, faith in God meant he did not need to create mayhem.

God can make you rich without making others poor. That was the new ideal. For long centuries, it was an ignored ideal, considered hopelessly impractical. The world is very slow to learn such lessons. It prefers to work according to the principle of the survival of the fittest, to push the weak to the wall and do the best for self, no matter who goes under. That is not the Bible way.

Abraham’s civilized principles are a lesson our civilization still has not fully grasped. Under Joshua, one warrior, Achan, kept the spoils of war. As a result, he brought lasting disgrace to his whole tribe and caused a rift in the unity of the nation three hundred years later. The main tribes broke away from Judah; Achan’s tribe was under King Rehoboam.

Rapacity has many forms. It appears today in the commercial world. Jesus spoke of such attitudes as being “Gentile” in Matthew 6:32–33, which says:

After all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that

you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Abraham and Lot

Lot, Abraham's nephew, embraced the typical attitude, thinking only about how he could do himself well and get the better of others. We see this in the situation that arose between Lot and Abraham. He and Abraham were men of substance with extensive herds—the wealth of those days. They needed good pastures. This had led to quarrels and even fights between their herdsmen and shepherds. It could have led to bloodshed and a permanent rift between uncle and nephew.

Abraham valued good relationships more than material gain, so he made an amazing and generous goodwill gesture to Lot, saying Lot could take what he wanted and Abraham would take what was left. Abraham knew Lot, and he knew Lot would take the best. He knew he could not shame his avaricious nephew. And Lot acted according to his character. He took the best, choosing the most fertile area, which “*was well watered everywhere...like the garden of the Lord*” (Genesis 13:10). Lot was well pleased with himself. Not only had he obtained the richest pastures, but the cities were also close by, quick markets for his business.

One of them was Sodom, already notorious for its wickedness. But for the sake of good business, Lot became a leading citizen. The New Testament says:

[God] delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds). (2 Peter 2:7–8)

But Lot chose to stay there just the same because of the good business opportunities. The Bible describes this as “loving the world.” (See 1 John 2:15.)

Faith Has No Elbows

In all groups of people, there are those who always seize the best chance or steal the show, who elbow others aside and occupy the front position. In contrast to these sorts, we find a man to admire in Acts 1: Joseph, called Barsabas, also called Justus. He must have had remarkable humility and godliness. Justus was one of two men chosen to potentially fill the vacancy among the twelve apostles after Judas committed suicide. They cast lots to determine the choice between Justus and Matthias; today we would say they tossed a coin. It came down heads

for Matthias, and we never hear of Justus in Scripture again.

What jealousy could have embittered him for the rest of his life! He seems to have been a disciple of John the Baptist who followed Christ from the very beginning. Now, he was thrust aside. He was not chosen as a member of the most illustrious group of men ever to walk on earth!

But the Bible gives not even a single hint that he took offence or disturbed the church by any resentment. History contains legends about his later career, which reflect nothing but credit upon him. It was thought that this Joseph, or Justus, was one of the seventy disciples whom Jesus had sent out, and he is said to have been the one to carry the gospel to Ethiopia. How was this possible? He was a man of faith who knew the Lord was on His side. When a man or woman has faith in God, the honors of people do not matter. They leave such issues in the hands of the Lord. Papius records that the pagans tried to poison this humble man, but he miraculously survived. A man who had such great trust in God that he carried no poison in his spirit was unlikely to become the victim of a poisoned chalice.

Lot never understood Abraham, who let his business sense be overruled by his principles of faith in God and who lost his social opportunities by staying away from the cities. Lot perhaps thought his uncle was a fool. Someone must be in the forefront, but the question is whether we desire honor or faith. Jesus said, *“How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?”* (John 5:44).

Abraham chose faith, and God added honor. Lot never did anything for the cities. But Abraham the man of faith did. He fought for them, he rescued their captured citizens, and he begged God not to destroy them. Of course, Sodom eventually was destroyed. In the story of its destruction, we read this remarkable comment: *“God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow”* (Genesis 19:29). Lot was delivered for the sake of Abraham!

Twice, Abraham rescued Lot. Lot finished his life living in a cave with his two incestuous daughters, whose morals had been so corrupted by the evils of Sodom that they had children by their own father. Of course, Lot had earlier offered them to the will of a sex-crazed mob as a substitute for his two male visitors, whom the Sodomites wanted. Concerning Lot’s wife, Jesus said, *“Remember Lot’s wife”* (Luke 17:32). Like the husbands of her daughters, she could not tear herself away from the city life. She and her sons-in-law provide a stark contrast to Abraham, who forsook the cities with his view filled with the vision of the city of God. Lot’s wife and sons-in-law cynically ignored the warnings, even from the angels, and perished. The very ground of Sodom exploded upward and

fell in sulfuric salts from the skies. Lot's wife was caught in the suffocating fumes, and the salts coated her like a pillar. This is a biblical example of the contrast between faith and no faith.

Ordered in All Things

Abraham believed God was making all things come together for good. He believed God's word to him, *"I am...your exceedingly great reward"* (Genesis 15:1). He felt no strain or anxiety about loss or gain. He had God—*El Shaddai*, "the Enough God." He did not want to have what God did not want him to have.

And God fulfilled the promise to Abraham to make of him a mighty nation. Abraham could afford to let Lot take the best pasturage. If you had asked Abraham what God gave him for his birthday, he would have said, "Canaan!"

And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered." (Genesis 13:14–16)

Lot had a small area and no divine covenant. While drunk, he fathered a family by his daughters that grew into sworn enemies of Israel. Everything he had sold his soul for, in his efforts to accumulate wealth, went up in the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah. Archaeology locates the possible site of these cities as beneath the waters of the Dead Sea.

Faith and Prosperity

Jesus put the principle of Abraham into His famous promise of the Sermon on the Mount, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). He said we should not worry about our lives: *"Do not worry about tomorrow"* (Matthew 6:34).

Jesus was thinking of the same blessing of Abraham that God said would bless all families. *"Your heavenly Father knows"* (Matthew 6:32); you do not need to remind Him or ask.

It is said that honesty pays, but not as much as faith. Christian families tend to rise higher in the social and prosperity scale. Christian organizations usually begin with working class men and women but are upwardly mobile.

Christian men usually have believed God, been prosperous, and have run their

businesses not merely for profit, but as a service and with benefit for their workers. Big business now puts the love of money before the love of people. The down-sizing principle in business today leaves the majority unsure and depressed about their future and their jobs. It is a vast social evil that breeds general uncertainty. That is bad for business. Putting money before people begins a downward spiral. Abraham was blessed because he lacked the money motive. As Jesus said, *“Wisdom is justified by her children”* (Matthew 11:19).

Faith Is Not a Facility for Getting More than Enough

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. (1 Timothy 6:8–9)

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5)

Private gain—having more than enough—is not the purpose of biblical faith. Nevertheless, faith creates conditions in which we can prosper according to God’s purpose, since He knows our hearts. If God wants a billionaire, He makes one, and no doubt He does so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. God never promises cash rewards, because cash is a poor reward and does not content anybody. God said to Abraham, *“I am...your exceedingly great reward”* (Genesis 15:1). The Philippians had faith and works, and their faith worked in gifts and aid to Paul in prison. Jesus stated this principle in Matthew 10:40–42:

He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me....And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.

For one thing, they receive Christ, the unspeakable gift. God rewards the one who gives to one of His workers in the same way He rewards the worker—to the missionary supporter the same as the missionary, to the one who prays as well as the one for whom he prays. So Paul could say to the Philippians, who had provided for him in prison, *“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

The people of faith in Scripture, like Abraham, had the will of God as their first,

second, and third priority. That meant seeking righteousness, seeking the lost sheep, giving their lives, and serving God with a single eye to His glory.

Faith in God and the profit motive are incompatible. In the second-to-last chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi was concerned with faith and affluence and confronted the people of Judah with their complaint: “*You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?’*” (Malachi 3:14). God called this a harsh thing to say. (See Malachi 3:13.) But He heard when those who lived on a different level and feared the Lord talked with one another. About them, He said: “‘*They shall be Mine,*’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘*On the day that I make them My jewels*’” (Malachi 3:17), and their actions were written in “*a book of remembrance*” (verse 16).

The biblical principle comes to us in ten words: “*not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*” (Romans 12:11). “*Fervent in spirit*” (Greek: *zeontes*, “boiling”) refers not only to red-hot revival meetings but also to doing business and earning a living as a service to God. One famous English churchman in the days of King Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, died shortly after being charged with high treason. His famous words at last were, “Had I but served my God as diligently as I have served the King, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs.” The truth was that he had served the king only to serve himself, making himself extremely wealthy and powerful. He would have been poorer had he served God, but he would have been infinitely happier.

The people God can trust with prosperity are those who have not set their hearts upon riches but upon Him. Jesus sat on the shore of Lake Galilee with the disciples and 153 large fish in a net. He Himself had told them to let down their nets for that haul. They had gone back to fishing and loved it. Jesus pointed to the boats, the net, and the fish. Then came the test, “*Do you love Me more than these?*” (John 21:15). It was the same as the test the Lord put before Abraham. Did he love God more than Isaac, the son of promise?

Much is said about wealth, prosperity, and poverty in Scripture. God does not want anybody to be poor, and godliness tends to wealth. Sin not only breeds poverty but also brings about the unholy accumulation of wealth to the damnation of those who possess it. James says to those who exploit and underpay their workers, “*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you*” (James 5:1).

As we have seen, the story of Abraham and Lot illustrates this complex subject better than any definitions or statements. Now each of us must diligently apply these biblical principles of faith, as taught throughout Scripture, in our own

spheres as we seek to live by faith in Christ—whether we are wealth creators or those who are dependent and needy.

PART 5

FAITH AND GOD'S CHARACTER

One question matters above all others, and that is: *What is God's character? What kind of God do we believe in? What is His nature or attitude?* Is He good, easy to please, and happy, or is He vindictive, difficult, and joyless? Is He the Great Critic, the hard-faced Judge? Does He care? Is He the “unmoved Mover,” indifferent to what goes on? What does He feel about our sins and our struggles? What really is His make-up? There are a thousand possibilities, and they change life around us.

Our attitude toward everything is settled by what we think about God. If we do not think about God, we are shameless fools. Unfortunately, what we think of Him often has a lot to do with the events around us.

Great nations are what they are because of their religious ideas, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. In Europe and the West, Christian culture and tradition shapes our minds differently from non-Christian peoples. So, as Kipling said:

Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet,
Till earth and sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat.⁴

Vast areas of belief and practice regarding oppression or freedom, restriction or liberty, and advance or stagnation depend directly upon whatever notions of deities are common in a nation. While these are temporal effects, our very souls also are staked on what we believe. The Bible strikes directly at the heart of things when it says: “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36).

What God?

The word *God* is ambiguous. To what or whom does *God* refer? It is all a matter of character. Is He just a sort-of something somewhere, a shapeless entity with a particular disposition? Millions of people make up a god from all kinds of odds and ends, opinions, and superstitions. Others talk about “The Absent Creator”; Gaia, the New Age god; the various gods of the philosophers; or the god of the Deists. Often, people who never open a Bible and know little about the subject talk as dogmatically as the Pope does. Ninety per cent of the arguments about God come from ignorance.

The greatest thinkers can do no more than speculate. We cannot spin God out of our own heads. By reason alone, we could never know even another human. It is impossible to know another person unless that person opens up to us. God naturally wishes us to know Him. He made us and does not want His creatures to live in ignorance. When we turn to the Bible, we have an impression of God so powerful that imagination has never matched it. Certainly no image or god of another religion can compare to the God of the Bible.

He Who Dwelt in the Bush

God is identified by how He acts in various situations in Scripture. We see this when Moses, the greatest of Israel’s prophets, prophesied over the twelve tribes of Israel, declaring who they were and who they would become. He blessed Joseph and said: “*Blessed of the Lord is his land...and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush*” (Deuteronomy 33:13,16).

It was that God, the God of the burning bush, whom Moses prophesied would come and bless Joseph. He described this visitation as God’s favor. God is the God of favor and goodwill toward us. The angels who heralded the birth of Christ used the same word. Luke 2:14 states, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*” That is God’s attitude—goodwill toward men. We are the people of God’s goodwill.

If we think of the primitive times when such words were first uttered, it is astonishing. The whole world was idolatrous. The gods were never shining examples of anything, certainly not of goodwill. Rather, they were as unreliable and temperamental as all earthlings, were often sullen, and had to be coaxed, flattered, and appeased to bestow any small favor.

Moses did not speak vaguely about the Lord God. He knew Him and referenced a revealing personal memory of Him—“*the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.*” Moses had not been praying at the bush, prostrating himself, or crying out for something supernatural to happen. God took it upon Himself to appear,

unprompted. As James 1:18 says, *“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”*

His goodwill on this occasion went beyond Israel. At that time, no free nation existed on earth. Therefore, God came down to introduce and initiate freedom by making Israel, His free people, the first free nation on earth. Their Sabbath said, “Men are not to be slaves who work every day that comes.” Leisure was God’s idea. Goodwill! That is the Lord in whom the Bible encourages us to have faith.

God’s Good Will

Scripture has much to say of God’s will. The word *will*, as used by the world, simply meant “a decision, a choice made without feeling.” But those who knew the Lord God thought of His will and gave it a richer meaning. When the will of the Lord was mentioned, it meant “desire, a heartfelt wish.” The will of God is not a cold, clinical judgment or a matter of moral righteousness. It is something that comes from His heart. He delights in goodness.

The same genial qualities are dominant throughout the entire Bible. God’s goodwill becomes knowledge. When atheists argue, it is that kind of God they argue about—not Krishna or Buddha or Allah. They are not monuments of openhearted and generous goodwill. But Scripture describes and distinguishes *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 15:6).

The word *goodwill* also describes God in the New Testament. Hebrews 6:17 uses the word twice: *“Thus God, determining [willing] to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel [will], confirmed it by an oath.”*

Romans 12:2 talks about the will of God being good, acceptable (well-pleasing), and perfect. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

The will of God is called “His pleasure.” It was prophesied that Christ would say, *“I delight to do Your will, O my God”* (Psalm 40:8). The pleasure or desire of God was also the desire and pleasure of Christ. As Jesus said, *“I always do those things that please Him”* (John 8:29), that is, that gave God pleasure. And God said His Son did indeed give Him great pleasure: *“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”* (Luke 3:22).

The Holy Spirit works in us what He worked in Christ, as we read in Philippians 2:13, *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His*

good pleasure.” His same goodwill toward us is mentioned in Ephesians 1:5, using the same words: *“having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”*

The will *“of Him who dwelt in the bush”* was frightening. To release Israel and introduce the idea of freedom, God rocked Egypt and convulsed nature. Nothing could stand in His way—not Pharaoh and his armies and gods; not the rivers and seas; not even Israel’s ingratitude and reluctance. They seemed to want to hug the chains that had bound them, but that would not do for God.

That is His character—goodwill; He is ready to turn the world the right side up, even tearing the Son of God from His own bosom and sending Him to earth to fulfill His wishes for the benefit and blessing of the unworthy sons of men.

What Is God Like?

We ask what God is like, but He is like nothing or nobody we know. We have no way to describe Him. *“To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One....His understanding is unsearchable*” (Isaiah 40:25, 28). God made man in His own image. But too often, man has made God in his own image.

However, He is not the unknown God. We can learn of Him. Jesus said, *“Learn from Me”* (Matthew 11:29), and the apostle Paul talks about *“increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10).

The Holy One

Israel had a name for God that was so holy they avoided using it if possible. In our Bibles, it is written as *“the Lord.”* The original in Hebrew is *Yahweh*. Some pronounce *Yahweh* as *Jehovah*. The Scriptures used by Jesus were in Greek, and these called God *“Lord”* (Greek: *kurios*). *Lord* is a common and ordinary word. The awesome name *Yahweh* was never used in the New Testament. It always uses *Lord*, even when quoting the Old Testament.

Experts have tried to find out where the great name of *Yahweh* came from. Some thought other eastern peoples had previously used it, but the name *Yahweh* was unique. It was only used in Israel. Divine revelation filled it with an awesome and profound meaning. The names of heathen deities were never like that. *Yahweh*, in fact, meant that He was separate, one on His own; in other words, it meant that He is holy. Isaiah said on behalf of God, *“there is none besides me”* (Isaiah 45:6). He was *“the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel”* (Isaiah 30:15).

The Inexpressible Name

The name of the Lord is not a mere label. Moses asked God what His name was. (See Exodus 3:13.) He had already heard His name. Even Abraham knew it, but “*He made known His ways to Moses*” (Psalm 103:7). In other words, Moses was asking what His name signified.

Moses realized the God who was sending Him to Egypt was more than he had ever realized when he used His name. Knowing the name of *Yahweh*, or knowing the name of an ocean, says nothing about its mysterious depths. God was more awesome than Moses had ever dreamed. God told him to take off his shoes (see Exodus 3:5), because the presence of God makes the desert sand holy. He is *the Lord*. Many gods exist, but only one *Yahweh*. No category of gods can possibly include Him. He is apart.

Isaiah 43:10 says Israel is witness to *Yahweh*. Jesus said His witnesses are His disciples. (See Acts 1:8.) The Christian witness has always been “Jesus Christ is Lord.” The name of Jesus is now the highest title in heaven and earth, the name of the King of kings. But this supreme name conveys more than the fact that God is holy and awesome. He became incarnate, suffered, died, and rose again for unworthy mortals. His title, Lord, signifies more than the Old Testament *Yahweh*. It also signifies God as He made Himself known in Christ, the final revelation.

Knowing the Unknowable

The New Testament says we can know Him who “*passes knowledge*” (Ephesians 3:19). He is “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3). One great mark distinguishes the God of the Bible—what He does. As the Psalmist put it, “*Oh, give thanks to the God of gods....To Him who alone does great wonders*” (Psalm 136:2, 4). It is His goodwill in operation. The prophet Elijah said, “*The God who answers by fire, He is God*” (1 Kings 18:24). When He answered by fire, the people shouted, “*The Lord, He is God*” (verse 39).

Most gods do nothing. But “*Jesus of Nazareth...went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*” (Acts 10:38). Christ is our example, and as Peter said, we “*should follow His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus said, “*He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also*” (John 14:12). Nobody can do what Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, or Confucius did, since they did nothing. They even suggested nothing could be done to change things.

By contrast, the character of God is one of concern, goodwill, and action. Jesus performs ten thousand wonders every hour of every day. He said, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*” (John 5:17). He has rivals, but they cannot compete. His character outshines all that is ever pictured in men, women, or myth.

The Peerless Gospel

The character of God is seen in Christ and in His gospel. In all our crusades, the gospel glory proves to be matchless, and vast multitudes come to us because their own religions offer so little. The gospel of Christ offers everything. Signs, wonders, marvels of salvation and conversion, and miracles of healing accompany it. His light and truth brighten the future and illuminate eternity. Evil spirits are expelled. Christ gives immunity to spells, curses, and all the works of the devil. (See 1 John 3:8.) In our crusades, we are dealing with the Supreme God of all gods, and millions recognize the fact. What Paul preached, we preach: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3–5)*

Our message is not in theories or ideas capable of being disputed. We preach Christ, a fact as much a part of everyday existence as the sun shining in the sky. We should have faith in a God like that. It would be a crime not to. He is more than worthy. “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.”⁵ Morally, there is no alternative.

What Does *Faithful* Mean?

If we are going to be full of faith, God must be faithful. The faithfulness of God is the great mark of the divine character. The Old Testament people exulted in the Lord for His faithfulness and sang of it in their psalms. We do not read of ancient Hebrews having faith, but they are described as trusting in God or calling upon Him and obeying Him. The word *faith* was applied to the Lord; He kept faith with His people.

The faithfulness of God meant He did not change from who He had said He was. He was faithful in Himself. He never deviates from what He had been, a God of integrity, always Himself, constantly the same. Whatever He did, it was always consistent with what He was. He never did anything out of character. Whatever He did was who He was. That faithfulness meant people could trust Him at every stage of their lives.

This has tremendous implications for Christian believers. What Jesus was when He went to Calvary, when He hung on the cross, when He was jeered at by enemies, and when He rose again—that is who He is. That is Jesus. It always was and always will be. He is “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8), and He is the same Lamb John saw seated on the throne of glory.

Today, He is still just the same Christ who hung on the cross for us. His love did not burn out in that one great effort of those bitter hours. The great sacrifice did not exhaust His goodwill. “*We preach Christ crucified*” (1 Corinthians 1:23). What He did on the cross is what He is now. What He was—bleeding, torn, and riveted with iron to the wooden cross—He is now—crowned with glory and seated upon the central throne of all creation.

He is the one who dwelt in the burning bush, the God of goodwill. The character of our God is incomparable. The God of faithfulness is the one in whom we can trust, the One who will do us nothing but good. That is who He is, and there is none beside Him.

4. Rudyard Kipling, “The Ballad of East and West,” lines 1–2.

5. Isaac Watts, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” 1707.

FAITH AND THE NAMES OF GOD

Seed Life

If we sow the seed of the Word, it germinates. That is the law of resurrection. The life-germ or life-spark in the Word is the name of the Lord. His name is the resurrection element of the Word of God, making the Bible “*living and powerful*” (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is the resurrection book; as a commentator has said, the Scriptures are “poised” on His name.

There are, of course, many divine names, and they are potent, not lifeless labels. Each one highlights some area of the divine character, and knowing them brings understanding and faith. They are like power points where we plug into who God is. We talk of people being “promising” because we see potential in them. That is God. His names are promises. They show what is in Him, stirring hope in our hearts for what we can expect of Him.

God Is Not the Nameless One

An evangelist colleague called George slipped into a church, unexpected, and sat at the back. Seeing him, the leader said, “We will ask George to offer prayer.” The evangelist did not pray, thinking he meant some other George known in the church, because his first name was used so familiarly. *George* did not distinguish him from all the others called George.

In one small town there were four preachers called Wright. To keep from getting mixed up, people called them the Rev. Up Wright, the Rev. Down Wright, the Rev. Forth Wright, and the Rev. Out Wright.

A thousand years ago, individuals in Europe only had one name. When more

people were born, they had to have a distinct designation, so they used their trade as a surname—John Smith, John Baker, John Cook, or John Miller. Sometimes they used their father’s personal name, such as John-son, James-son. Bible people did the same—James the son of Zebedee or Bar-abbas (meaning “son of a father,” probably illegitimate). There were many people named James and John, so Jesus nicknamed them the “*Sons of Thunder*” (Mark 3:17). When Jesus met Simon, Andrew’s brother, Jesus said, “‘*You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas [Peter]*’ (which is translated, *A Stone*)” (John 1:42). Thus, we know Simon as Peter, the chief apostle.

God sometimes referred to Himself as “I” or “I, even I.” The fact is, as the supreme Proprietor of everything, as the Creator and Owner, He does not really need to say who He is. Speaking as “I” places Him as the all-important head of all things. He declares “I am”—the presence nobody can escape from or afford to ignore, as Psalm 139:8 reminds us, “*If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.*”

We may think everybody knows who God is and, therefore, He does not need a name. This is not true. *God* is not a personal name but a common noun for a whole class. God does not belong to a class, yet many people believe in different deities or have confused ideas about Him. Not only that, but names tell us what kind of God He is and who people have found Him to be.

On this point, 1 Corinthians 8:5–6 makes an important statement:

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

He is the one who made all things, the Triune God of Christian revelation—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From our angle, God’s divine names multiply once we think of Him. He is more than any single god or goddess ever was, even all of them put together. Actually, He gave Himself various names. As I mentioned earlier, the great name of God was *Yahweh*, or Lord. *Yahweh* disguised the mystery of God, which is revealed in the New Testament, the mystery of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Each title describes something perceived about Him. When we look at anything, no two viewers have exactly the same impression. That is also true when we look at God. Everybody has a different angle. Individuals each appreciate God differently. People have favorite titles for Him. We say, “What I like about Him

is...” Nathaniel’s spontaneous cry on meeting Jesus was, “*Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel*” (John 1:49). When Mary Magdalene saw Christ alive from the dead, her true regard for Him simply burst out: ““*Rabboni!*” (*which is to say, Teacher*)” (John 20:16). True knowledge of the Lord transmutes into devotion and worship. George Herbert, the humble aristocrat clergyman and famous poet, a favorite of King James I, loved the Lord dearly. He was often quoted by Charles Spurgeon for his line, “How sweetly doth *My Master* sound!”⁶

But of course, the name of Jesus is the supremely loved name in heaven and earth. (See Philippians 2:9–10.) The name *Jesus* conjures up in our minds the highest and best picture of God, a picture that far surpasses that of any other religion on earth. It is not a matter of sentiment or curiosity. What God is called illuminates various areas of the deity that bear directly on faith. The favorite name in the book of Revelation is “the Lamb,” which is used twenty-nine times. Faith in Christ as the Lamb is saving faith. Revelation includes many other descriptive names for Jesus, eleven in the first chapter alone.

Working Titles and Phrases

The first chapter of John’s Gospel contains eleven different titles for Jesus. They are: the Word; the Light; the One and Only; Jesus Christ; the Lamb of God; the Son of God; the Messiah; Jesus of Nazareth; the son of Joseph; Rabbi; the King of Israel; the Son of Man.

He is also referred to by name-phrases—“*of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote*” (John 1:45); “*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*” (Matthew 3:11); “*He who comes after me*” (John 1:15); “[the one] *upon whom you see the Spirit descending*” (John 1:33).

That last phrase, “[the one] *upon whom you see the Spirit descending*,” was a sign only for John the Baptist. But in the rest of these phrases, we find more than just a historical reference. When it says Christ is the one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit, it means that is who He is for everybody for all time, not just for a Bible character. This is the highest sign of all, the one credential of the Messiah above all others, that He baptizes in the Spirit. That is who to look for and what to look for as pragmatic proof. If anything ever was absolute proof of anybody, that is it!

Jesus was not styled by excessively ingratiating or grandiose words. He was pointed out according to what He actually does. He baptizes in the Spirit. Not believing in that experience today, many throw away one of the greatest biblical

evidences of the deity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But this baptism is needed as a personal experience, not just a theology. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not trivial, common, or incidental. It is not a mere religious gesture, a hand waved to bless us. It is unmatched—the exclusive promise of Jesus Christ—and He alone has ever bestowed it. It is wonderful and hard evidence.

This experience is a finger pointing unmistakably and directly at the one with whom we are dealing. It settles questions. A down-to-earth character like doubting Thomas, after he was baptized in the Spirit, needed no further convincing. Jesus is the Baptizer in the Spirit! That is one of His most wonderful titles. It shows Him to be the true “*I even I*,” the One and Only God, the same one who inspired the prophets and spoke through the lips of Joel, saying, “*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh*” (Joel 2:28). He said He would, and He did. That is who He is.

Amen

Among the many titles of the Lord is “The Amen,” which is first noted in Isaiah 65:16, “*the God of truth*” and last in Revelation 3:14, “*These things says the Amen*.” It is not just a formal ending to a prayer, a kind of “over and out.” *Amen* actually never ends any prayers in the New Testament. Nor does it mean the same as, “Hear! Hear!” It declares a determined purpose to be behind whatever is said, as for example in somebody’s prayer. God is all that.

So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth [Hebrew: amen]; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth [Hebrew: amen]. (Isaiah 65:16)

“*These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness*” (Revelation 3:14). God is the *Amen*. He is “*Faithful and True*” to what He said about Himself. He has a name or reputation for unchanging goodness. David prayed in 2 Samuel 7:23, saying God went out to redeem a people, “*to make for Himself a name, and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds*.” David then invoked the Lord’s personal faithfulness: “*Now, O Lord God...do as You have said. So let Your name be magnified forever*” (2 Samuel 7:25–26). God would not fail Himself and lose His name and His reputation.

This appears again many years later:

You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. (Nehemiah 9:10)

He will be faithful to what He has taught us about Himself. Nehemiah knew the same God Moses knew—who had the same unchanged character. Today, we also know the same God the Bible people knew—the faithful, covenant-keeping God. Ezekiel 20:9 reads, “*But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.*” What He did create was His fame, and He never lets Himself down.

We often pray, “Lord, glorify Your holy name.” We want everybody to honor and praise Him, but actually it means, “confirm your name,” prove who You are. In His prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus said, “*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*” (John 17:4). Christ Jesus had done what He said, and so God had been faithful to His purposes and promises. The name of God crystallizes His reputation. When we read of the name of the Lord in the Old Testament, it is always *Yahweh*, and *Yahweh* was always true to what He said and who He is. “*He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13).

God, being the God of Amen, has an attitude that is supportive and never indifferent. When we come to Him, He smiles upon us, responds in love, and says “Amen.” That *amen* word means “faithful, sure, trustworthy.” God tries to assure us and quiet our nervousness or misgivings by being the Amen God. He is dependable—not fickle or changeable.

If the Lord had changed from how the Bible depicts Him, the Bible would be useless. We would not know who He is. We would only know Him as the ex-God of the Jews and the unknown quantity X to us. However, Christians know He is the faithful and true God of the Bible.

The *Yahweh* Names

Several *Yahweh* titles exist, each of which was given by revelation. Moses knew the name *Yahweh* but not the depth of its awesome wonder. Abraham also knew of *Yahweh*. In Genesis 27:20, Jacob said, “*Because the Lord your God brought it to me.*” Once Jacob asked His name, to which God said, “*Why is it that you ask about My name?*” (Genesis 32:29). His name was *Yahweh*, as Jacob very well knew, but what Jacob wanted to know was its significance. When Moses also asked about His name, he got the cryptic answer, “*I am who I am*” (Exodus 3:14). It meant that whatever He was, it was a secret. But it also meant the secret would be opened up and shared with those who believed—as time went on.

In one circumstance after another, people saw more and more of who God is.

His great name *Yahweh* was opened up, and new revelations were summed up with a second name. Each new *Yahweh* title gives us increased grounds for faith and for ever-increasing faith.

Power in the Name

Not only have we been given the privilege of knowing His name and “*calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16), but we are also called by His name. (See Isaiah 43:7.) His people are surnamed after Him, “the Lord’s people,” just as Israel was “*Yahweh’s people*.” Before Moses knew His name, the Lord said, “*Do not draw near this place*” (Exodus 3:5), but in the name of Jesus “*we draw near to God*” (Hebrews 7:19).

Jesus showed us what this great privilege is—a kind of power or authority. It is not a magic formula, but the power of knowledge of the divine. If we know what somebody is like, that person’s strengths and weaknesses, we know how to handle that person. In biblical times, people felt they gave themselves away when they gave their name away. It gave others an advantage over them. To ask a person’s name was to ask about that person’s character. When we come to God, we can come believing when we know His name. *Yahweh* was just a distinguishing title at the beginning, until by His deeds it was understood better.

In this short chapter, we cannot explore all the *Yahweh* titles, but their richness must not be glossed over either. Here are a few:

1. *Yahweh-Sabaoth—The Lord of Hosts.* (See 1 Samuel 17:45.) This appears over 250 times in Scripture. We first hear it when David comes against the Philistine warrior champion, Goliath, in that historic confrontation. David did not act on what everybody else believed, but he did act on the fact that God was with the army of Israel—the God of their *host*, which was the word for army in those times. David realized Israel’s armies were not God’s sole resource. He had other reserves, hosts upon hosts, and He was and still is the God of Hosts.

And as the God of Hosts, He is on the side of all who love and trust Him. “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Romans 8:31) People of faith are in conflict with the whole philosophy of this world, in its aims and methods. But it is not a losing battle. Christ has already overcome the world, and we are more than overcomers in Him.

2. *Yahweh-Jirah—The Lord Provides.* (See Genesis 22:14.) Abraham gave this name to the place where he went to offer Isaac, his only son. God stopped this human sacrifice (such sacrifices were quite acceptable to people’s ways and customs then) and gave Abraham a ram instead. This partly fulfilled Abraham’s

prophecy that God would provide a lamb, but the real fulfillment came later when God provided the Lamb for the sins of the whole world. Greater than all He provides, materially or spiritually, the supreme fulfillment of *Yahweh Jirah* is Christ, who took our place in judgment. The world lives by God's material and physical supply but brushes past the very thing that points to God's eternal provision.

3. *Yahweh-Rophi*—The Lord Heals. (See Exodus 15:26.) This was a revelation about God, and God cannot be anything other than who He is, whether to Israel or to any other nation. Here He was speaking of physical recovery, but God is a healing God in all types of brokenness and illness, whether physical, domestic, national, or spiritual. He is the *Yahweh* of salvation.

4. *Yahweh-Nissi*—The Lord Is My Banner. (See Exodus 17:15.) Moses gave this name to an altar of thanks to God after Israel had successfully repulsed a treacherous attack by the Amalekites at a time when Israel was ill-prepared for battle. Moses had prayed this victory through. God is the God of victory. "*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

5. *Yahweh-Shalom*—The Lord Is Peace. (See Judges 6:24.) This was the name of an altar built by Gideon following the divine visitation in which he was told: "*Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?*" (Judges 6:14). Gideon's victory began bloodlessly when the invaders panicked at Gideon's strategy of faith, showing that God requires peace, not bloodshed. *Shalom* is the great Hebrew word so often used in Scripture for wellbeing, prosperity, good health, and safety. Jesus greeted His disciples with "*Shalom!*" He still does, "*having made peace through the blood of His cross*" (Colossians 1:20).

6. *Yahweh-Tsidkenu*—The Lord Our Righteousness. (See Jeremiah 23:6.) Jeremiah spoke of the one to come who would be "*a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth*" (Jeremiah 23:5), and added, "*now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness*" (verse 6). This title firmly links Jesus Christ, the Branch (or shoot) of David's dynasty, to *Yahweh*. It is God's own name, and it was realized in Christ, who shed no blood but His own to bring in eternal righteousness.

7. *Yahweh-Shammah*—The Lord Is There. (See Ezekiel 48:35.) What a profound statement about God—He never arrives but is always there. We cannot precede Him. Jesus said, "*Where two or three are gathered together in My name,*

I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). He is before all things, the eternal *I am* whenever and wherever we are, a “*very present help*” (Psalm 46:1). This is the mystery we can never fathom but can always enjoy.

Such *Yahweh* titles could be multiplied, for the Lord is all things to all people. The principle is *according to your faith let it be to you*” (Matthew 9:29). What God finally is, the last man on earth will not have discovered, but faith explores the great goodness of God.

Psalm 23 is an example. Behind each of its statements stands the name of *Yahweh*. Each line of it teaches us who God is and names Him:

The Lord is my shepherd; [Yahweh-Raah]

I shall not want. [Yahweh-Jireh]

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters. [Yahweh-Shalom]

He restores my soul; [Yahweh-Rophi]

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. [Yahweh-Tsidkenu]

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for You are with me; [Yahweh-Sabaoth]

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me; [Yahweh-Mekadesh]

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; [Yahweh-Nissi]

You anoint my head with oil; [Yahweh-Rophi]

My cup overflows. [Yahweh-Jireh]

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; [Yahweh-Shalom]

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. [Yahweh-Shammah]

God said, “*I am who I am*” (Genesis 3:14). He cannot be anything other than who He is, at any time, for anybody, and in all dispensations, places, and circumstances. The names we have mentioned are simply to commemorate moments and events when men and women proved who He is. Will His names ever be exhausted?

FAITH AND GOD'S "I WILL"

The "I Will" God

The phrase "*I will*" occurs about four thousand times in Scripture. It is a common expression used frequently by everybody. Every language must have some equivalent word or phrase. The curious thing is that in the Bible God says it far more than everybody else put together.

Through the lips of the Old Testament prophets, the Lord constantly said, "*I will*," and it became a special feature emphasized in many passages. In Exodus, God used the phrase, "*I will*" ninety-six times, but the same words are used by others only twenty-two times, and what they declare they will do is referred to only thirty-two times. God's use of it is so frequent that it sets up the Bible as the Word and will of God.

These are some very significant Bible facts. In Genesis 9, we have the first biblical example of God's special use of "*I will*." Between verses 9 and 17, God used an expression like "*I will*" eight times. God deals with us all on such terms. Our part is to believe. The prophecy of Isaiah represents God speaking and using "*I will*" in almost every chapter. In chapters 41 and 46, He said, "*I will*," forty-six times. Through the lips of Jeremiah the prophet, God said, "*I will*," hundreds of times. We read it in forty-nine out of the fifty-two chapters, and in chapter 30, God says, "*I will*," twenty-eight times!

The New Testament is similar. In the Gospels, almost everything said comes from Jesus, and He says constantly what He will do, and He also does many of the things He says. Little is made of what anybody else says, which is unusual.

The Human “I Will”

However, the gospels do pick out special cases when people said, “*I will.*” Sometimes it was a human “*I will*” that failed. The rich man said, “*I will do this*” (Luke 12:18), but he did not do it because he died. The would-be disciple said, “*I will follow You wherever You go*” (Matthew 8:19), but did not. Peter said, “*I will not deny You*” (Matthew 26:35), but he did. The devil told Jesus, “*All this authority I will give You*” (Luke 4:6), but he never did. Jesus spoke about a son who said, “*I go, sir,*” but did not go, and his brother who said, “*I will not*” (Matthew 21:28–30), but went.

The book of James makes “*I will*” quite an issue:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” (James 4:13–15)

For James, it is what God wills, not what we will, that takes effect—not our “*I will*” but God’s “*I will.*”

The Supreme “I Will”

Christ came to fulfill the Father’s “*I will.*” Therefore, His will is supreme. Even early in Christ’s work, one man had the most extraordinary understanding of Christ’s will. He was an unknown leper. He came to Jesus when He came down from giving the Sermon on the Mount.

When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. (Matthew 8:1–3)

He was one person among the multitudes who heard Jesus. We read that “*they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Mark 1:22).

The scribes taught what other scribes and scholars had already said. The academics today are very similar. Most of their teaching is just a quotation of other scholars. Unless theologians quote other theologians, they are not considered sufficiently informed, but their authority is built on one another. Their work seems to be to consider what every other scholar has said and then

give their own judgment as to who is right. They are simply tottering towers of opinion, often a house of cards about to fall. The teachers of Christ's day did the same. Jesus, however, spoke on His own original authority. His words were, "Amen! Amen! I say to you."

The leper came and worshipped Christ, saying, "*Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.*"

Jesus touched him and said, "*I am willing; be cleansed.*" And "*Immediately his leprosy was cleansed*" (Matthew 8:2–3). This is notable. The man perceived Christ's authority lay in two directions. First, the man saw Christ's authority was unlimited. Second, he worshipped Him because he saw that what Christ willed was all that mattered. Possibly nobody else in the Gospels reached this depth of insight. At least, nobody expressed it so clearly. The man had no doubt about His power. He knew Jesus could do anything, but he also knew everything rested on Christ's will.

Jesus said, "*I will.*" He also said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*" (Mark 13:31). Therefore, "*I will*" will never pass away. It tells us what He is like when He sees leprosy and evil—for all time. The words of Jesus are to all. His words revealed who He was yesterday—and who He was yesterday, He is today. "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). His revelation was not private, for just one man, but is written as part of the Word of God to us all. His act of cleansing this nameless leper declared His will to heal to all nameless sufferers from the evils of this world.

Similarly, in the beginning God spoke. He said, "*Let there be light*" (Genesis 1:2), and there is light to this day. His command endures and makes the sun work in the way it does. His word is the most real thing of all. When He said, "*I am willing*" to a leper, it showed what kind of will it was. His will is good, merciful, and positive. That is the very essence of His revelation about Himself. Jesus said, "*I am willing*" to one sufferer on behalf of all sufferers.

We must pray for His will to be done, and we can do this because we know what it is. We do not need to pray "*if it is Your will,*" when He has shown us what His will is.

Christ does the will of the Father, and like the Father, He is the great "*I am willing*" God. This paints a picture of our God with His open face and love shining upon us. What a Light upon our rugged path through life! "*I will*" characterizes God all along the road, all the way through Scripture. He says to humankind, "*I will.*"

This is the phrase used at the marriage altar by the bride and bridegroom when they commit themselves to one another. It is as if the Almighty stood at the marriage altar and committed Himself with the same words. *“Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name....With everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you”* (Isaiah 54:5, 8). That typifies His attitude to us all. It seems that it is never, “I will not.” He is never sullen, unwilling, unyielding, or reluctant, but when we come to Him, His face is open. All that is needed is this: *“Your people shall be volunteers [willing] in the day of Your power”* (Psalm 110:3).

Positive and Negative

God’s “I will” is always positive, but of the fifty-four references to what people will do in Exodus, most are negative—what man will not do. God does not say what He will not do. For example, look at Exodus 3:19–20, which sets out God’s positive goodwill and the human attempt to oppose it and negate it. But God comes back at it with His persistent positive, overcoming the human negative:

*But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So **I will** stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which **I will** do in its midst; and after that **he will** let you go. (Exodus 3:19–20)*

His Word Is His Will

The Bible is the Word of God, and it declares His eternal will. What He has done tells us what He will do and who He is. It would be pointless for Him to tell us what His will was if it had changed. It would then only have historical or academic interest. But the Bible is here to show us what God is throughout all ages.

Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth....His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations. (1 Chronicles 16:12–15)

Time does not affect Him, but it affects everybody and everything else. God is not a figure of past history. In Him, everything is present. In glory, He is the crucified one, the Lamb of God. The absolute essence of faith is to accept God today to be what He was yesterday. We have no other grounds for trust except that we believe He will keep faith with us. He will not be one thing today and

another thing tomorrow. He is not temperamental. He made one revelation forever about Himself. If He does not live up to it, then the revelation is worthless. But His name is *Faithful and True*. Jesus also said Himself, “*These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness*” (Revelation 3:14).

We should not perform surgery on the Word of God, cutting dispensations where we think fit. Only one dispensation exists, the dispensation of God’s everlasting grace. Even “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*” (Genesis 6:8). He deals with us all by grace, as He did with Adam and as He will forever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the same grace God proclaimed to Moses, saying, “*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious*” (Exodus 34:6).

As I’ve said before, we only know who God is by what He does. He is a God of activity. He does not sit aloft like Allah or the millions of gods of India or Buddha, doing nothing. Allah just allows things, and they say “Kismet”—it is his will, or fate. A Christian does not believe in fate. To have faith in God means to have faith in a God who acts, who answers prayer, and who performs wonders.

Read who He was, and believe who He is—“*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Revelation 1:8). When people read their Bibles and expect God to bless them, answer their prayers, prosper them, heal them, work miracles, and save them—that is what the Bible calls *faith*. Such people have struck the keynote of Scripture “on the nose.”

Unfortunately, the Bible is often interpreted negatively. Many believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God but much of it does not apply for today. What happened in times gone by is no promise for now. It is past history only. This mindset defeats the very purpose for which Scripture was written. The Bible exists to create faith in the God of the Bible. He showed who and what He was by His acts.

If God is not in the same business anymore, we no longer have a biblical God. We no longer have a God we can base our faith on. God’s Word is not information only. It is life to be appropriated.

These are written that you may believe...and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. (Jeremiah 15:16)

The Covenant “I Will”

When God says, “*I will*,” He forms a covenant. “*Because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself*” (Hebrews 6:13) to perform certain deeds. Usually, these covenants are unconditional, but some will fail if we do not grab hold of them and act upon them. We can describe this with the word *unilateral*, which refers to action by one party only. Genesis 9:8–10 gives us an example:

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.”

This is a solo resolution, without a second party. It is unilateral. Nevertheless, it is for a second party. It is made for Noah, his sons, his descendants, and even for the birds and wild creatures that could not make any agreement with God. It contains no proviso and lays down no terms.

It is important to see that God’s “*I will*” covenants have two qualities. They are spontaneous, and they are absolute. Nobody pressed God for the covenants, and they stand firm without any condition. They are a sheer act of grace and concern from start to finish. That is, God and Jesus said, “*Have faith in God*” (Mark 11:22)—leave things to Him. He does all things well.

The “*I Will*” of Christ

The Gospel of Matthew records thirteen undertakings of Christ using the words “*I will*.” These thirteen are not the full complement of what He will do, but He speaks in the same way as the Lord God of the prophets, and He stands as the Son, by the side of His Father, as the great “*I will*.”

Most of Christ’s claims relate to the immediate present, not some far off future. He said:

Come to Me...and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

I will make you fishers of men. (Matthew 4:19)

Each of these is backed by His truthfulness alone. Jesus never tries to convince people of what He has said. He does not argue. His words are enough, and if believed, they prove themselves. There is no other proof.

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold....He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street....He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the

earth. (*Isaiah 42:1–4*)

We believe based entirely on His authority. He said, “*If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24).

“I Will” and He Did

There is a tremendous “*I will*” in John 14:16. It is unconditional and inevitable, a sheer unsolicited act of the divine will. “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.*” Christ did not say, “If you pray.” He said, “*I will pray.*” The disciples did not pray for it. The day of Pentecost was not the result of a church beseeching God and prevailing in perfect unity—as is so often suggested. It was the sovereign act of Christ and the Father independent of all human action.

It was also a fulfillment of the “*I will*” of God in Joel 2:28: “*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.*” God’s outpoured Spirit is not a matter of the will of people and of their desires and prayers. The Helper has come. We have no need to pray, “Lord, rend the heavens and come down.” He is here! Nothing is needed but faith to act. We can safely rest in the assurance, the established fact, that the Spirit of God is with us.

The disciples were simply together on the day of Pentecost. They were not praying. They were sitting together for mutual support at a critical time. Then Jesus simply did what He said He would do. They did not ask Him to do it. There was no need. He said He would, and He did.

The Lord has also fulfilled His promise in the twentieth century. The major part of the churches, even the evangelicals, attempted to stop what was happening. Many of them had prayed for revival, but they opposed the form in which it came. In Berlin, scores of Protestant churches declared the outpouring of God’s Spirit to be “from below.” But God had said He would pour out His Spirit, and nothing could stop Him. He has, and He continues to do so. Now a major section of the worldwide church has plunged into the river flowing from the throne.

Christ said, “*I will build My church.*” He has, He still is doing so, and He will complete it. As believers, we are on the side of the inevitable. He walks with victory, and He faces the dawn, not the darkness. The kingdom is coming.

FAITH AND GOD'S "I"

Why do we have faith in a person? The answer is simple. We have faith in others based on who they are, their standing, and their character. If someone says to us, "Trust me!" we do not unless we know them well. We do not trust just anybody.

Knowing Means Trusting

Scripture hammers home the truth that we can trust God because of who He is. It is His identity to be trustworthy, as is clearly laid out in the Bible. People may claim their experiences have proved God, but the Scriptures must confirm it. Experience can come from other sources; only the Bible is objective truth. As 1 John 4:1–2 states, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit....Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.*" People who merely make noises or go into trances are making no such acknowledgement.

Sometimes believing in God is described as "believing on the name of the Lord." John 2:23 says that "*many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.*" His name to them just meant miracle signs. God has various names that sum up who He is.

We can believe people—believe what they say—or we can believe *in* them—if we believe they have integrity. Who we believe *in* is all-important. We may believe in a doctor or a solicitor or a minister. We then trust this person for what he or she can do for us, like when we place ourselves in a surgeon's hands. But what about God? We are not dealing here with someone of limited skills. He is the All-Sufficient One in whom we can rest our entire confidence concerning all our affairs; we can totally give our lives over to Him, confident that He can certainly make a better job of them than we can.

Jesus said: "*You believe in God, believe also in Me*" (John 14:1). "*He who*

believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me” (John 12:44).

The Claim of God

Look again at those two verses, and you will note that *Me* occurs four times, where God speaks of Himself. He keeps using and stressing the pronouns *Me*, *I*, and *Myself* to encourage us to have confidence in Him based on His divine integrity. This *I* is emphasized in special ways: “*I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior*” (Isaiah 43:11). “*Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one*” (Isaiah 44:8). From this, a warning arises. “*Woe to him who strives with his Maker*” (Isaiah 45:9). If we cannot trust God who made us, then we are lost.

When the Bible was written, everybody followed his or her gods. However, the Israelites had nothing to do with the visible idols. They called upon the invisible God and knew something of Him. From them came the first streaks of civilized freedom, a thousand years before Greece or Rome existed. We cannot be better than what we believe. Civilization in every age rests upon the revelation of a God of integrity to whom we are all accountable.

God’s Matchless Nature

Israel knew they could not treat the Lord as just another one of the many deities. He was transcendent, “*the Holy One of Israel*” (2 Kings 19:22), far above everything else in existence. When King Solomon dedicated the temple, he said, “*Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built*” (1 Kings 8:27).

Nobody ever trusted the pagan gods. Nobody committed his or her life to Aphrodite or Zeus. It is hard for modern people to appreciate what it was like living two millennia ago. With all their temples, altars, practices, and celebration of pagan festivals, people had no religious feeling and no spiritual ideals whatsoever. Today, Christianity has molded everybody’s mind. Back then, pagans busily attended to their altars because they feared the gods and were anxious in case the gods turned nasty.

By contrast, the Lord (*Yahweh*) permeated the whole of life. “*There is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other*” (Isaiah 45:6). He was separate—holy. On one occasion, when Moses prayed, God gave Him new light and understanding. This passage holds important truths for everybody, as well as for all the nations, whether they admit it or not:

Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:5–7)

This passage links God's name, "*the Lord*," to His nature, which is "*merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*." Israel understood these characteristics to be great virtues when they were present in people.

Ego and God

The Lord says "*I*" over and over. When men and women talk about themselves, it is usually nothing but vanity, love of self, and pride. Nobody alive is that special. But God says, "*There is none besides Me*" (Isaiah 45:6) and constantly uses the word *I* when addressing us. He is a firm foundation. "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."⁷

But the Lord does more than say "*I*." He also lays extra emphasis upon it in various ways. Many times He says, "*I, the Lord*" or uses double repetitions like, "*I, even I*" (Isaiah 43:11), "*I Myself*" (Ezekiel 34:11), or "*I am He*" (Isaiah 46:4). All this is for the purpose of emphasizing who He is, and He often links such phrases with a further statement about Himself. For example, "*the Lord, the God of Israel*" (Jeremiah 24:5); "*I [am] the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place*" (Isaiah 43:3).

He says these sorts of things because He is unique, and He wants to encourage us to trust Him for what He can do. "*Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel*" (Isaiah 43:14). "*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins*" (Isaiah 43:25). No one else was like Him or acted in this way. If we do not trust Him, we will find nobody else to trust. As Peter said, "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). It was a common fact that only God could save. Psalm 73:25 says, "*Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*"

The Mystery of I—He

Now we come to something unusual. When it comes to God, we “*know in part*”; we do not yet know Him “*face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We know, but we do not know it all. The scientist Haldane said, “Creation is not only more wonderful than we think, but more wonderful than we can think.”

With that in mind, let’s look at a strange expression used in Isaiah 41:4: “*I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He.*” The verb *am* is not in the original Hebrew. The translators added it, but actually God is speaking of Himself here as “I—He.”

It is an example of the greatness and wonder of the Lord and His name. When Manoah asked the Angel of the Lord His name, the Lord said, “*Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?*” (Judges 13:18). The same word is used in Isaiah 9:6, “*His name will be called Wonderful.*” His name is a wonder, a mystery. The word is also used to describe Christ’s miracles in Matthew 21:15, “*But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did.*” God’s name is a wonder name, a miracle name. It holds secrets about Him.

What does “I—He” mean, or what does it tell us? We can find something more about it from two other passages of Scripture:

Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

So, “*Me*” is the same one as “*Him*” whom they pierced and for whom they are mourning. The same God is speaking, which is the wonder-mystery of the Godhead. This “*Me*” and “*Him*” is also described as a child of Israel, like an only child. Isaiah said, “*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given*” (Isaiah 9:6). Zechariah spoke about this child as being pierced. Matthew’s Gospel in the first verse identifies this child and son, saying, “*Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*” Jesus called Himself “*the Son of Man.*” Now both Abraham and David had special sons, but neither of them was the true promised Son spoken of by Isaiah. The true son of the house of David is Jesus, the Christ.

This is the Son, *the Child*, whom God spoke about through Zechariah saying:

“They will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10). So the “Me” is the “Him,” and the “I” is the “He.” Jesus said, *“I and My Father [I and He] are one”* (John 10:30).

I Am

Since God is “*I am*,” His Son also is “*I am*.” The Father is “*I*” and the Son is “*He*.” The one who was pierced was both “*Me*” and “*Him*.” The Father was involved with the Son at Calvary, and we read that *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). God called Himself “*your Redeemer*” in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who was pierced for us, redeems us. That piercing of the Son also pierced the heart of the Father.

Isaiah 45:6 also uses the great title of God, “*I am*”—“*I am the Lord, and there is no other*.” His name was given to Moses as, “*I am who I am*” (Exodus 3:14). The Hebrew experts have translated this various ways, but it is not possible to translate it into other languages or even to make good grammar out of it in Hebrew.

Moses asked God about His name, yet he already knew it—the Lord (Hebrew: *Yahweh*). Abraham also knew this name, but its significance was not yet revealed. The experience he had of God was as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), which is only one side of divine greatness. God had promised Sarah a son, and she laughed, but the Lord said, “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” (Genesis 18:14). The name of the Lord needed a display of something more than omnipotence. Moses saw it, and the meanings of the name Lord, which had been veiled, began to emerge.

Later, the whole process of revelation changed. It no longer came through prophets but through God’s Son Jesus the Christ.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. (Hebrews 1:1–2)

The “*I am*” title of God is applied to Jesus in John’s Gospel. In some instances, Christ’s “*I am*” is exactly the same as the “*I am*” of the Lord in the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus said, “*I am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11), and Psalm 23:1 says, “*The Lord is my shepherd*.” Psalm 80:1 also refers to the Lord

as “*O Shepherd of Israel.*” Likewise, Jesus said, “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:48), and in Deuteronomy 8:3, the words of God are bread.

Jesus also uses “*I am*” in the absolute sense in John 8:58, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*” He did not say, “Before Abraham was, I was,” but “*I am.*” Christ spoke similarly to God, as when “*God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you’*”” (Exodus 3:14). He is the timeless one; to Him, the past and the future are alike.

God cannot be depicted in a picture, carved in marble, or put into words. God forbade the Israelites from making an image of Him because it would have conveyed a wrong idea. Some idols are so horrible that such portraits would please no self-respecting god. The heathen wanted something to see and feel. They made images out of wood or clay. But Zephaniah 3:11 knows something the heathen did not know about the Lord who is “*mighty to save.*” This mighty God was not mere gross material or flesh. He was of an infinitely more wonderful substance, too real for our weak eye. God is a Spirit. Isaiah said, “*Truly You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior*” (Isaiah 45:15).

God says “*I am who I am,*” and we shall progress in insight as the time goes by. Moses learned what God was when he appeared before Pharaoh, and even more when he entered the tabernacle. “*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel*” (Psalm 103:7).

The Spirit of God guides us into all truth. We cannot grasp the ocean of God in our span, and know all things at once. We shall learn as He fulfills the Word.

Today, people talk about information overload. The Internet and other sources supply more detail and facts than we have time to use or even to absorb. Business people find it impossible to go through the masses of information at their disposal before they make a decision. Neither can believers know everything about God, but we can trust Him. True knowledge of God galvanizes, burns in our hearts, and moves us. Jesus said, “*Learn from Me*” (Matthew 11:29)—that is, learn about Him from Him. To know Him is life.

PART 6

FAITH FOR THE NIGHT

John's Gospel is the most subtle in the Bible. It is full of literal events and expressions that we are meant to read in an understanding way. Here are two or three instances full of value and meaning. As John said, "*these are written that you may believe...and that believing you may have life in His name*" (John 20:31).

John 6:17, 22 states that "*it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them....[They] had gone away alone.*" That is one remark, but another comes later that makes these verses even more striking. However, what John wanted us to understand first of all is that until Jesus joins us, it is always dark. It was and always is.

The Greeks came and said to Philip, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus*" (John 12:21). Though the Greeks were then the most educated race on earth, they were in darkness; they were spiritually benighted. As one writer says about their times and their religious ideas:

They are aware of a supernatural reality [but they do not] credit this reality with benevolence towards mankind, [being] blind, often destructive in their operation.

Darkness. The Greeks had no concept of a Father in heaven giving His Son out of love for humankind. Jesus spoke to them of giving His life for them. Their own ideas were of dangerous gods. Paul the apostle was well acquainted with such stories and called those days, "*the times of this ignorance*" (Acts 17:30).

Now look again at the well-known and true story in John 6. The disciples, rowing hard against wind and current in the darkness, suddenly seemed to see a phantom figure gliding across the churning surface of the lake. Their fears doubled. Hardy men as they were, they shouted with terror. Then, above the

howl of the winds, cutting across the spume came Christ's voice, "*It is I; do not be afraid*" (John 6:20). Jesus was a carpenter or builder, not a seaman, but they knew that "with Christ in the vessel they can smile at the storm."⁸ He was and is the conqueror of devils and darkness.

Till then, they were alone. (See John 6:22.) That is what the multitude noticed. Jesus had such tremendous stature in their eyes that when the disciples went without Him, they were alone. They were a dozen weather-hardened fishermen together, boatmen, experts on familiar waters, but because Jesus was not with them, they were alone! They were worse than alone. They were lonely and in the dark.

If all of the six billion people on this planet had no Jesus, we would all be alone together, in the dark. This world would be as dreadful and lonely as winter in the ice-clad Antarctic. But He is there! Or rather—here! We are not alone in an unfriendly universe. We have a Friend, "*I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again...that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:3). Meanwhile? "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). That man Jesus relieves the anxiety of us all.

Even in a waterlogged old boat, clutched by hissing waves, the disciples were immediately relieved when Jesus said, "*It is I, be not afraid.*" The words recorded in the Greek (*ego eimi*) are literally "*I am.*" Because He is, we can feel safe. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me*" (Psalm 23:4). That is all we need to know.

Then John adds that final touch: "*Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going*" (John 6:21). No doubt they were more than willing to take Him into the boat, but Mark 6:48 says He "*would have passed them by.*" In other words, it was up to them. If they were willing, He would be with them. That is always the way of Jesus. He waits for our invitation.

Now here is the important result: "***Immediately*** the boat was at the land where they were going." When Jesus arrived, they arrived; when Jesus comes to us, we have arrived. That is life's highest point, the goal. Christ is the shore to which we are heading. He is the purpose of all our travel.

An interesting confrontation with Jesus is recorded in Matthew 8:19–20. A man told Jesus, "*Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go*" (verse 19). He thought Jesus was going somewhere, and if he went with Him, he would get somewhere, too. He wanted a place in life, especially with a man who talked about a

kingdom. He was a social climber. What blindness! Jesus was not going to be something or going to get somewhere. He *is* the somewhere, the everywhere, the beginning, and the end. The kingdom *is* Jesus. He is the only light of the world. If you follow a light, where do you find yourself? Eventually, you get to the light! Follow the light of Christ, and you will find yourself at His feet. He lights the way only in one direction, to Himself. He is the Way—both its beginning and its ending—*“the land where they were going.”*

Some invite us to join in their search for truth and for the light. But if they do not have light already, how can they find anything? In the dark, they may fall over the truth and not know what it is. They say, “It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.” In other words, they prefer to search forever and never find. But Jesus said, *“Seek, and you will find”* (Matthew 7:7). Seeking is all that some people know; they are always looking for something, but they do not know what it is, what it looks like, or if it is even there! Paul warned Timothy about such blind guides who are *“always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2 Timothy 3:7).

They do not like us—the true believers in Christ—because we say we have found it. *“I know whom I have believed”* (2 Timothy 1:12). Some of us do not want to be eternal wanderers like the legendary Flying Dutchman, the phantom ship under full sail that is said to be seen in storms off the Cape of Good Hope but is never able to enter the harbor. With Christ, we have already reached the harbor. He is our eternal home out of the darkness.

Here is another night. Judas *“then went out immediately. And it was night”* (John 13:30). *“Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers... came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons”* (John 18:3).

When Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane, He led the disciples. They carried no torches or lanterns. He had resorted often to that grove of olive trees to pray; therefore, He knew every path. Even in the moonlight, it was still dark under the trees. Without Him, Judas and the others needed lanterns. John remembered Christ’s words: *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Jesus makes lanterns redundant. However, the world makes its own artificial light, proudly independent and preferring brainpower to God’s power. Moses said:

If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes....All these curses will come upon you and overtake you. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness. (Deuteronomy 28:15, 29)

Job saw it happening in his day as well:

He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth...they grope in the dark without light. (Job 12:24–25)

Isaiah 59:9–10 testifies that:

We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind...we stumble at noonday as at twilight.

Paul told the Greeks at Corinth that “*the world through wisdom did not know God*” (1 Corinthians 1:21). This is one verse in the Bible that nobody can contradict. Libraries are filled with the reasoning of the most acute brains that ever existed, and they tell us precisely nothing except that they are sure of nothing. Lanterns and torches!

Moses described this as “*confusion of heart*” (Deuteronomy 28:28). The most confused people on earth are those who rely on reason alone. They do not know how to spell out the truth. A man was wearing a badge with IAK on it. He said it meant, “I am confused.”

A friend told him, “Confused is spelled with a c, not a k.”

He replied, “Well that is how confused I am.” Faith clarifies the mind, but it does not stop at faith. It becomes knowledge and light. Faith pulls the blinds up, not down.

We have had two and half thousand years of thought, and today it is still exactly as Moses, Job, and Isaiah said—people grope like the blind with their hands on the wall at noonday. Since Christ came, it has been noon:

Arise, shine; for your light has come! (Isaiah 60:1)

The Sun of Righteousness shall arise. (Malachi 4:2)

Which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:8)

Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40)

Then John talks about another night: “*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark*” (John 20:1). Once again, John has a double meaning behind his words “*while it was still dark*.” When Christ rose, the dawn came for the whole world. But for those dreadful hours, as far as the whole world was concerned—and for the disciples and Mary Magdalene in particular—it was not just dark, but very dark.

When Christ died, the candle of hope was snuffed out. For those three days and nights, truth was eclipsed. Jesus warned the disciples this time would come in John 9:4–5, “*The night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” He had gone, they thought. The night had come. *It was still dark*—but not for long!

Mary “*ran and came to Simon Peter*” and John, and immediately they jumped up, started out for the tomb, and “*both ran together*” (John 20:2, 4). Mary also found her way back. John reached the tomb first and stood outside, bending over to look inside, as the opening was not a six-foot doorway but was only half that size. John deemed it important to record that he “*saw the linen cloths lying there*” (John 20:5). Peter then rushed up. Being the impetuous one, he went into the tomb. Then John mentions that Peter also “*saw the linen cloths lying there*” (John 20:6). John distinguished the way these three people saw by using three different words; thus we see these three—Mary, Peter, and John—represent the way three different kinds of people see.

When Mary saw the stone was removed, the word *saw* is the ordinary word for seeing (Greek: *blepo*). When John came, he stooped down and saw in the same way as Mary; he simply saw the linen wrappings along with everything else. It was a casual look, incidental.

That is one way of seeing. Many hear testimonies of Christ, His transforming power, and His miracle healings. They may even pick up the Bible and read it, but this seeing of Christ is casual. They hardly give such things a second thought. Such seeing contains no faith. In fact, it is blind seeing, a dark lantern that relies only on physical sight; the spiritual aspect is totally missed. For Mary, it was *still dark*, and so it is for all who shrug their shoulders at the supernatural evidences of the living Jesus.

Peter then came and began going into things. To start, he went into the tomb. There “*he saw*” the linen wrappings; this time a different word is used (Greek: *theoreo*), meaning he paid particular attention to them. Whatever had happened to the body of Jesus, those linen wrappings should not be there. They should have gone with Him. It was strange. It needed an explanation. But he left it at that.

That is the second way of seeing. People take notice and want an explanation. The universe is wonderful. Strange things happen. Prayers are answered. Dying people recover. Nature is incredible. Such things leave many people guessing, including the scientists. Millions admit the existence of mystery, of unusual things. But these remain a mystery awaiting an answer. Many even enjoy the

mystery and perceive nothing in the gloom of the tomb.

Then John went into the tomb. He saw what Peter had seen, but John had the eyes of a seer. It says “*he saw and believed*” (John 20:8). The Gospel distinguishes this with a different word (Greek: *eido*), which means “to see with the mind’s eye” and signifies a clear and purely mental perception. Verse 9 says, “*For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*” We do not know when John precisely did start believing, but we know one thing for sure—he believed in Christ. That is, he believed Jesus was always the master, always the winner. John did not know about and could not imagine anything as fantastic as resurrection, but his faith rested when he did not understand. Somehow, Jesus had won and tossed these grave clothes aside.

John perceived—the third way of seeing, to “see and believe.” We can look around, observe the same things as others, read the same Bible, hear the same testimonies, living in the same world—yet perceive it all with different eyes based on the understanding deep within us. Our spirits recognize our origin—that “something” is personal, caring, and real.

Mary continued seeing, yet not seeing. She saw two angels, and then she saw Jesus, but she was still simply gazing (*theoreo*), like Peter inspecting the grave clothes. Then Jesus spoke, and her ears told her what her eyes had fail to. Nobody could say “*Mary*” like He did. “*She turned*” (John 20:16) and experienced the greatest change—a reversal. Suddenly she recognized that He was alive.

Faith makes “*seeing Him who is invisible*” (Hebrews 11:27) possible. Suddenly, we see Jesus and recognize Him for who He is—the one, the God of the Bible, the one who should be dead and is not. We see who He was and who He continues to be as the savior who wins human hearts, answers prayer, heals the sick, blesses our souls, and creates and recreates. When we see and believe, we perceive what is happening and understand the evidence fits only one person, Jesus.

It is dark till Jesus comes. It is lonely till He comes. It is all mystery till He comes. Yet when we are willing to take Him into the boat, we arrive at the shore where we are heading.

FAITH AND NIGHT-SIGHT

Seeing the Unseen

Can you see God? No! Is He the only one you cannot see? Of course not! Plenty of other invisible realities exist. We are all immersed in a vast sea of unseen forces. Can you see radio waves or the magnetic fields by which the stars keep their ancient places? All around us, even going through our very bodies, are powerful emissions that we can detect only with instruments. Some radiation could destroy us before we ever felt it. Natural human perception is very limited. Even a cat can hear what you cannot, and a snake can sight its prey in the pitch darkness.

The first words Jesus said to His disciples were, “*Come and see*” (John 1:39). He came to make us see, to enable us to see in the dark. He knew this spiritual sight is as vital to our lives as anything in nature. The great theme in John’s Gospel is inner sight, seeing more than meets the eye. This spiritual reality belongs to a different order, a realm the physical eyes cannot discern.

As John mentions, some people witnessed Christ’s miracles and made nothing of them. Like sheep, they nourished a blind life within the brain. The visible displays the invisible—“*The heavens declare the glory of God*” (Psalm 19:1), but those without faith cannot recognize it. Also, the world lies in wickedness and spiritual darkness. The unseen is doubly unseen.

Faith’s Infrared

In the natural realm, we have ways to render the invisible visible. The infrared camera can take photographs on the blackest of nights. Police use radar

helicopters to find a thief in the dark, even under trees. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, nobody needs to walk in darkness. We have a way to see “*Him who is invisible*” (Hebrews 11:27). The instrument is faith. It is our infrared. Because of it, we have eyes to see and can walk in the ignorance and blackness of our world with confidence, as in daylight. Believers “*are all sons of light and sons of the day*” (1 Thessalonians 5:5), “*for we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

A Lamp Is for the Dark

Faith is like a lamp; it is of no use in daylight. The only chance faith will ever get is now, in a world of sin and trouble. It cannot operate in heaven, where nothing is at risk. Faith will be lost in sight. “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face...and now abide[s] faith*” (1 Corinthians 13:12–13).

1. Faith is our autopilot for the flight, not for when we land and walk the crystal floor of glory.
2. Faith is like gold. It can stand the fire.
3. Faith that does not come through the fire is like “fool’s gold”—pyrites that only looks like the real thing.
4. Fair-weather faith is not faith at all. Faith is not possible except in storm and cloud.

Light Conquers Darkness

Our chapter on “Faith and Light” (Chapter 19) comes entirely from the Gospel of John. Light and darkness are the index for the whole book, as seen by the fact that John uses the word *darkness* fourteen times. Its course is set in John 1:5: “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*”

That word *comprehend* is worth a second glance, as it has several variations of meaning, including: “to grasp, obtain, overtake, surprise, apprehend, seize, or come suddenly upon.” Why does he use such expressions and ambiguous allusions? The reason is very important. He wants to test readers, not browbeat or blind them with science. They can interpret his words as they choose, and it will prove what they are.

Now look at that word again. It has that long list of meanings, telling us what

the darkness cannot do—such as grasping, overtaking, and apprehending. No matter what darkness threatens with, whether it is overtaking or seizing or surprising or anything else, it can in no way prevail against light. Believers are on the winning side. They are not odds-on favorites; they are unconditional winners. Darkness never gets the better of light.

John sets out to demonstrate this in various ways. Sometimes he mentions physical darkness, or earthly night, and gives it a special significance. It is a hint for us to read between the lines. In this chapter, we will look at those instances that will help us along our way just as John intended. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*” (Psalm 119:105).

The Man in the Night

We will look first at John 3:1–7: “*A man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus... came to Jesus by night*” (verses 1–2). He really was a delegate from the leading religionists. What Jesus said to him is famous, “*You must be born again*” (verse 7). Incidentally, he meant not only Nicodemus but also the people who had sent him. He said, “*unless one*” meaning “anyone,” and in verse 7, He said “*you*” in the plural.

The Gospel of John mentions Nicodemus three times, and on each occasion it reminds us that “*he came by night.*” John wants us to catch that Nicodemus was not just coming after sunset, but he was coming in the darkness of those times. Israel had lost the light in a religious power failure, and all their brilliant Rabbis could not repair the fault.

Jerusalem had all the best religious equipment; it was elaborate, expensive, and very ornamental. Thousands of priests served by turns in the temple, which was a world wonder with a golden roof no bird could perch upon. They had impressive daily pageantry and sacrifices; wonderful male voice choirs; the finest hymn book ever written (the Psalms); and especially the Law, the prophets and the writings—the complete Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures.

It was all there. It reminds me of the electric wiring set up to illuminate a city, with the lamps and chandeliers swinging in the darkness, dead. Their Jerusalem temple was a spiritual illustration. It had no light, no windows, and the priests moved around inside using oil lamps, a picture of artificial religion, “*having a form of godliness but denying its power*” (2 Timothy 3:5). Originally, the Holy Place was illuminated by the glory of God and no windows were needed, but then *ichabod* reigned—“*the glory has departed from Israel*” (1 Samuel 4:21).

Yet, the Bible teachers of Israel were certain they were right. Jesus was sure

they were not right. He said to Nicodemus, “*Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*” (John 3:10). Faith brings understanding. It is a strange but real experience, and suddenly, when you trust Christ, the future is like day breaking on the horizon. You just know it.

Of course, false sight also exists, like a mirage that looks real but is not. In the desert, an oasis seems to appear, but there is no water there. Many leaders at the time of Jesus had a mirage religion. They had a fierce belief, but it was as arid as the desert. They had no water. They defended their religion fiercely and were prepared to die for it. They did a lot for it, but it did nothing for them because it was law without light.

Today many useless gods exist, demanding everything but doing nothing. They offer no water of life, only duties and hopes. For millions of people and even whole nations, God is only another name for silent fate. He does not speak but has simply decreed everything beforehand; his will is fixed. He does nothing, changes nothing, and hears no petitions. Such a god quenches no thirst, which is why the worst darkness of all is religious darkness. Jesus said, “*If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness*” (Matthew 6:23).

Even some believers in the Bible think of God like that, as a has-been, used-to-be deity. To them, the active God of the Bible is no longer active in the same way. But of course, if God does not do what He once did, how can we say He is the same? Some Christians are very logical, fundamental, and correct people, but when it comes to the supernatural, it better not be in their backyard! Do not knock on their front door talking of signs and wonders.

However, we cannot contend for the original gospel and deny its original power. People can be converted to a doctrine, instead of being introduced to an experience of life and born of the Spirit. Faith switches on the power, and then believers become “*a city that is set on a hill [that] cannot be hidden*” (Matthew 5:14).

It is telling that the slaves released from Egypt wanted to go back and made a golden calf to take them back. They murmured against God because they missed the salads of their slave days and would have exchanged their freedom for cucumber, garlic, and lettuce. That is a common human psychology, especially in religion. People are so long in the gloom that they cannot stand sunshine. They have warmed their fetters, wearing them so long that they want to keep them. Faith in Christ means freedom instead of slavery, light instead of gloom. But some fiercely resent such benefits. Their prison doors are open, but they shrink back into their cells because “*men loved darkness rather than light*” (John

3:19).

FAITH AND LIGHT

As we mentioned previously, we can see in three different ways:

- With the eyes
- With the rational mind
- By heart-faith

Heart-faith gets faith off the drawing board and into production, which is what John 9 is all about. Every episode in this Gospel turns the lamp wick higher, building up in brilliance until we can say with John, “*We beheld His glory*” (John 1:14). The words of Jesus Himself, at the end of the chapter, sum matters up:

For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind...If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, “We see.” Therefore your sin remains. (John 9:39, 41)

This is a double paradox, typical of the way Jesus taught, but we will soon see what it means.

Talk Instead of Faith

When Steven Langton divided the Bible into chapters seven hundred years ago, he started John 9 at the wrong place. It is the story of Christ healing the blind man when men in the temple took up stones to kill Jesus. John 8:59 should read like this: “*Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by [and] as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.*” Then, John 9:1 should begin. As He escaped from fanatics trying to murder Him, Jesus still could feel concern for an afflicted man

suffering the lifelong calamity of sightlessness. That is the Jesus touch.

However, that is not how the disciples looked at him. They were used to seeing blind beggars but took notice when Jesus did. He said nothing for a moment, so they, of course, felt they must make some comment (we must talk, whether it is just words or sense). So they articulated the common platitudes about why the man was born blind—the half-baked ideas of those times. It was either his sin (before he was born) or his parents sin, one or the other—which? Did it matter which?

It is human to talk about affliction, like Job's talkative "comforters," Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. For some, life is all problems. Some preachers deal with nothing else, and even on Easter Sunday morning, they mount the pulpit and say, "Friends, our problem this morning is...." Some congregations are inflicted more with the problem of suffering imposed upon them Sunday by Sunday than anything else they endure. Talk is often a substitute for faith, and many a sermon is a justification of unbelief.

Jesus was no more interested in philosophizing about illness than a surgeon is when his patient is on the operating table. He offers no explanations. "*The Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8). His answer is not in words, but "*by His stripes we are healed*" (Isaiah 53:5). God speaks, but His words are creative. He says amen to His own words and does what He says.

In this instance, the disciples had nothing of use to say, simply parroting cheap popular ideas. Yet Jesus showed endless patience with them. Their comments were their only interest in the man, and they demanded neither faith nor action. Then Jesus solved the question of whether it was the man or his parents who sinned, astonishing them by saying, "*Neither!*" Just like that, He upset two thousand years of religious ideas. But then, healing a blind man was also unheard of.

Sight, God's Work and Ours

Jesus followed up by saying, "*But that the works of God should be revealed in him*" (John 9:3). He meant exactly that—"the works of God." Had not God made man from clay at the beginning? Could the works of God with clay be repeated? If He could do anything like that, it said a lot about who He was. Later He said, "*You believe in God, believe also in Me*" (John 14:1). He was giving us every reason to do so, because He did what God did.

Genesis 2:6–7 says that "*a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole*

face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground”—water and dust. We are 70 percent water. Jesus mirrored the original creation in what He did next—“*spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva*” (John 9:6). Adam was made in a garden full of rivers and pools, so Jesus sent the man off to a similar environment, to “*wash in the pool of Siloam*” (John 9:7). (*Siloam* means “sent.”) The spirit of Jesus waited there, and the Creator’s hand worked again its eternal wonder. As the first man saw, so did this man. The one who did it in Eden did it again.

God never meant for people to be blind. Adam was not created blind, and God never wanted anybody to be blind, by birth or any other means. The work of God is sight, not sightlessness. He does not want us to go through life blind, either spiritually or physically.

Some people say God made this man blind just to heal him. That is fatalism. We are not God’s guinea pigs, and God is not cynical. Plenty of blind people already existed in that day, and He had no need to make one blind so He could make him see. “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1:3). Light is the essence of God’s nature. Thus we can see that what Jesus really said was “Let the works of God be done,” not “So that the works can be done.”

Then Jesus turned this marvelous wonder into a parable—“*As long as it is day we must [imperative] do the work of him that sent me. Night is coming when no man can work. While I am in the world I am the light of the world*” (John 9:4–5 niv). Do you notice it? Jesus changed *me* to *we*. We must do the work of the one who sent Christ. It is the same work, of course, for which He sent Christ—to bring light and sight. That is the business God is in, and we are His business partners (or maybe His shop assistants), handing out His goodness to all who come. The one who said, “*Let there be light*” also said to His disciples, in the Sermon on the Mount, “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14).

We go to church and find comfort—a good thing to do—but it is not our greatest purpose. We are lights in the darkness, guides for the storm-tossed. Moses entered God’s presence not merely to enjoy Him but to bring some of the glory back for Israel to see, and they did see it on his face.

One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was the Pharos lighthouse at Alexandria—then the tallest building in the world and the only lighthouse. Its light was simply a fire. Pharos was also a religious symbol, because light in the darkness was a rare thing back then, both physically and spiritually. At first only Christ carried that fire; then He lit a fire in His disciples and sent them to scatter fire on the earth so the storm-tossed could find their way home. Still today, no

other light exists but the light of Christ.

From Minus to Plus Faith

The question is: Why should Jesus give this man sight? Jesus did it without so much as a “by your leave.” Nobody asked Him or pressured Him to do it, and the man himself did not call upon Him as blind Bartimaeus did. Of course, Christ has the right to heal, as well as the power, but why did He bother? Why did God bother?

Theologians call it a sovereign act of God, but that explains nothing. *Sovereign* simply means God acted as He pleased. He always does that anyway. It is like having backache and having the doctor tell you it is *Lumbago*—which means backache. Our questions are the same. Why did God choose to act that way? What motivated Him?

It just is not good enough to talk about sovereignty. Jesus did not come to tell us God is mysterious and beyond all understanding. In His coming, He assured us of His unfailing goodness. He desired more for us than just knowing Him; He wanted us to understand Him, too, because He is not a God of uncertain character who randomly manifests inexplicable bursts of kindness, without rhyme or reason.

Jesus performed wonders in order to explain God, who is unchangeable, and to create in us confidence. “*Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail*” (Psalm 89:33). Without God’s solid reliability, faith is impossible. God does not go by fits and starts. That is not sovereignty. It would be no foundation for faith. His acts might sometimes be beyond our grasp, but they are performed in perfect integrity, truth, and wisdom. Scripture says of God, “*You have performed Your words, for You are righteous*” (Nehemiah 9:8).

The reason why God healed this man and others is so obvious we often miss it. It is like looking through a window to find glass—though the windowpane is glass. God healed this man because He is like that. His reason is His nature. If we choose to listen to music, it is because music lives within us. If we have to be dragged to a concert, it is proof that music is not in our hearts. In other words, what we do spontaneously shows who we are. God never acts out of character, and healing this man shows His character.

Not only is God love, but He is love-prompted. A spontaneous outflow of free goodness is not traceable to some eternal and mysterious sovereignty, but to His normal personality. He came to bring light, to make the blind to see, and to lead

us in goodness. Jesus' decision to give eyes to this blind man tells us all we need to know; now we understand Him.

From Faith to Faith

This man born blind is not the only one Jesus has healed. I thank God for that reality in my own meetings. I am eager to see such mercy draw people to God, and I wonder about the subsequent story of their faith. What is the long-term impact on the faith of anybody who has been healed by God? In this passage, John traces this one man and finds out.

Immediately after the man was healed, people asked him who had done it. He replied, "*A Man called Jesus*" (John 9:11). A man—that was his first idea. After all, who else was around but men? He knew it was not a woman.

However, as the temple leaders began questioning him, he thought about it more and realized this Jesus was no ordinary man. He had heard of the prophets, though they were thin on the ground. The last one had lived four hundred years before. When the temple leaders asked him, "*What do you say about Him?*" he replied, "*He is a prophet*" (John 9:17). His faith was exploring this miracle.

That was not the answer the religious leaders wanted. This man was a notable example of Christ's activity, and he would make a powerful spokesman against Jesus if they could turn him to their side. If he said Jesus was a sinner, that would be very useful. So they questioned him a second time, after talking to his father and mother, asking him a theological question—Is Jesus a sinner? We do not know the man's religious background, except that he was Jewish and his parents were synagogue members. But one thing was now part of his religion—his experience. He said, "*One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see*" (John 9:25). He would not accept any religious ideas that did not tally with a positive experience—and nobody should.

I enjoy salvation, healing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and a thousand more realities—and these must fit into my religion. I find them in the same Bible that Jesus, Paul, Luther, Wesley, and many others did. Rationalists, liberal scholars, and other unbelievers offer me constantly shifting theological opinions and cannot accommodate the weight of my experience. They use the word *fundamentalist* against me, but what God has done simply cannot be wiped from the record. They cannot rewrite history. I am loading a cargo of gold, my faith-gold that has been tried in the fire. The "*wise and prudent*" (Luke 10:21)—as Jesus calls them—sit on the shore telling me my gold is worthless, and I say—Let them! I am not the judge of the worth of my faith, but I am not going to

jettison my faith, no matter how plausible their advice may be.

The blind man was irritated by the attitude of the religious critics. They asked him again to tell them what had happened, obviously hoping to find a fault. He said, *“I told you already, and you did not listen”* (John 9:27). Too often, people do not really want to hear the truth about God; they do not want to know, because it is light, and they love darkness instead.

When the facts cannot be denied, people often turn to personal mockery, like the temple leaders, who taunted the man as a disciple of Jesus: *“You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples”* (John 9:28).

If he had retorted, “No I am not,” he would have been quoted as no friend of Christ, but he did not deny Christ. Then the once blind man spoke a truth that frightened them:

Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing. (John 9:31–33)

Their cross-questioning had only forced him to consider who Jesus really was, and it had become plain to him that Jesus was *from God*.

At that, they threw him out. That is the way of the world; it always has been and still is. If you become devoted to Jesus, no matter what He has done for you (especially open your eyes, which He always does), you enter into conflict with the way of the world, which is the valley of the blind.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and...found him” (John 9:35). This made it all worth it. Jesus was better company than the religious die-hards and the dry, old unbelievers of the temple. Jesus had given him his eyes, and He now pursued this man’s faith to the final notch, which was unusual for Jesus. He asked, *“Do you believe in the Son of God?”* That is the million-dollar-question, for, *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life”* (John 3:36). Eyes are one thing, but life is infinitely greater.

The man admitted he did not know who the Son of God was, but he would believe if he knew. Jesus said, *“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you”* (John 9:37).

The man had come a long way. He now saw not only with new physical eyes but also with new spiritual perception. He believed, but he needed knowledge—like John who examined the evidence in Christ’s tomb. Jesus had witnessed to Himself through healing the man, and he already knew Jesus was *from God*; now

he discovered the nature of that relationship—Jesus was, in fact, “*the Son of God*” (John 9:35).

Now what? What response would he give? Should he say, “I’ll follow You,” or, “You can rely on my help,” or what? For once, Christ got the response He was looking for; the man said, “*Lord I believe,*” and “*he worshipped Him*” (John 9:38). Faith’s ultimate purpose is life, and its ultimate reaction, is worship. “*The Father is seeking such to worship Him*” (John 4:23).

To See or Not See?

John’s great question is, “To see or not to see?” Despite the twenty million books filling the British Museum Library, the mystery of life still remains. For thousands of years, the minds of humans have tackled life’s great questions, and they are as far away from an answer as ever. God, speaking through Isaiah, complained, “*Israel does not know, My people do not consider*” (Isaiah 1:3). God does not want us ignorant about the meaning of life.

Only God can give us the answer to the meaning of life questions because they are spiritual in nature, and in fact, God is the answer; He is the why of everything. The answers are a divine revelation, and they can never be received except by faith. Faith is the only possible way to know. In John’s first letter, he uses the words *know* and *we know* twenty-six times. Faith is the infrared camera with a wide-angle lens. As finite humans, we walk in the darkness, but faith gives us night-sight eyes.

The modern outlook has been influenced deeply by the Danish writer Soren Kierkegaard, who, sadly, described faith as, “a leap into the dark.” What nonsense! Faith is a leap into the light. A greater writer, Paul the apostle, said, “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Colossians 1:13).

In his Gospel, John presented Jesus and everything related to Him as alive and active. Christian living is a daily, on-going, believing experience. The true light now shines, but many—because they have pulled down the blinds of unbelief—grope around in uncertainty. Why squint in the gloom, illuminated only by the flickering candles of human thought, if you don’t have to? This is what people do who choose brain power over God’s power.

Those who talk most about “seeking the truth” do not expect to come to a conclusion. They travel but do not expect to get anywhere. Jesus said, “*Seek, and you will find*” (Matthew 7:7)—that is, if you *want* to find. Some call themselves agnostics and are, by definition, “uncertain of all claims to knowledge.” They

deny they can know. I wonder how they know they cannot know. The last thing they want is to find out the gospel is true, which is perhaps the most perverse of all attitudes. Paul met people like them in his day, people who were “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7). John explains why: “*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19). The blaze of glory and light that falls on those who believe may be too great for the unclean to bear. Nobody ever came to Christ clean, but those who come always go on their way cleansed.

PART 7

FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS

The gods of the pagans always stood apart from the lives of their followers, who feared and mistrusted them. For Israel, however, trust in the Lord was their life stance. To Christians, Jesus Christ means even more. Faith in Him is their soul's spiritual life-blood; it is in constant circulation.

The gods were always parasites, demanding much but giving nothing. By contrast, the Lord demanded only love and gave everything. When we believe in the name of Jesus, we are not just believers, we are “*a new creation in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are re-positioned with a personality shift or transfer. We are not just club members who stand up to be counted for Jesus; we are placed inside what His name represents. We live in Him, inside all He did for us. Believers become something new that springs from who Christ is. We do not know the fullness of what this “something” is at present:

Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)

Some effects of faith are already evident. Faith makes life rational, makes it add up. The experience is liberating, like when orphans find their father or the condemned are reprieved or light scatters the darkness. The endless and empty darkness of eternity is filled with warm sunshine.

From *Yahweh* to Jesus

The world says, ‘What’s in a name?’ We have already answered that all-important question in earlier chapters. We now have the highest name of all—Jesus, so it is important for us to know what is in His name.

We begin to find out by looking again at the great name of God, the Lord

(*Yahweh*). Israel held that name as sacred and awesome. At the beginning, it was only a title, like a sealed book. They did not know what was in it. It held the mystery of God's very being, a holy secret. Even Moses had to ask what it was, and God's answer was simply, "*I am who I am*" (Exodus 3:14). Who He was had not yet been revealed.

But, "*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel*" (Psalm 103:7). Then, "*precept upon precept, line upon line*" (Isaiah 28:10), the Lord opened His glory to Israel. Name was added to name, but His greatest name was not yet known. It would not be a mere title or a mystery but a great explanation. It would not be known until it was understood in all its wonder, height, and depth. It is the name of Jesus.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11)

The Message Is Himself

The gospel is not a theological doctrine. Mark 1:1 calls it "*the beginning of the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" It is not some good news about Him. One can have good news about people, about their successes or good fortune. But they themselves are not news. In contrast, Jesus is news—not history. He is the world's most alive news, and He makes news every hour. Jesus is not only a historical figure, but He is the greatest person alive today.

The gospel, the good news, is the good news *of* Jesus. He is the good news. We have faith in Him, not just in what He said or in the doctrines about Him, but *in* Him. He is not a proposition but our great friend. Books have been written about God as "the ground of our being," but that is not Jesus. The Jesus known by millions is a life-changing Savior with a living hand stretched out to comfort and encourage.

The book of Hebrews begins "*God...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*" (Hebrews 1:1–2). It means He has spoken to us about Himself, which is evident in the fact that the text immediately proceeds to talk about *who* He is. God's message to us is about Himself, not just about morals or ultimate purposes. The Bible is not for philosophic and intellectual interest but to create a love connection. Everything is in Him; He is the Beginning and Ending, the fountain of reality. His name, Jesus, crystallizes a million blessings.

Jesus was “*a teacher come from God*” (John 3:2), as Nicodemus saw, but His teaching always centered on Himself and went back to Himself. He said, “*You search the Scriptures...and these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39). His message was, “*Come to Me...learn from Me*” —that is, “get to know me.”

Jesus said, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). If the Father is like Jesus, then God is more wonderful than anybody had ever realized. Israel had their wonderful knowledge of God, but Jesus lifted it to the seventh heaven. The Lord has many glorious names, such as *Yahweh Jireh*, but the name of Jesus is higher than every other name, because it includes them all. “*There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the fullest expression of all the *Yahweh* names declared about God. As Hebrews 1:3 states, He is “*the express image of His [God’s] person.*”

If God is like Jesus, then the Almighty is not an unfeeling monolith in a far away heaven. He could not rest on the throne when things had gone so wrong on earth. He had to come and do something about it. Jesus is God in action, and so is the Holy Spirit. When the first Christian martyr lifted up his eyes, he saw Jesus standing by the right hand of God—not sitting! (See Acts 7:56.) The Lord had risen to receive him.

When Jesus came, God’s glory was revealed. On this earth, a man’s glory is what he does or makes. An artist’s glory is a great painting. An engineer’s glory is a great bridge. God’s glory is His works—not just the *shekinah* (the divine flame illuminating the Holy of Holies) or the shattering spectacle of a trembling Mount Sinai. His glory was His labor and love, selflessness and sacrifice, humility and obedience. Most of all, to Him the cross was His glory, as He tells us throughout the last chapters of John’s Gospel.

God the Son displays God the Father. He is not an inscrutable being wrapped up in Himself, a solo God, but He is a wonderful Godhead, the thrice Holy Tri-unity in everlasting interaction, eternal communion, ceaseless love and fellowship who radiates love throughout all creation.

When we believe in the name of Jesus, we believe all that is in it. Thus, even a child can name His name to begin mighty events.

One fact is too wonderful not to be true—the Son of God became the Son of Man. It is impossible for humans to comprehend. If people cannot believe it, they certainly could not invent it. Unless it had happened, it never would have crossed anyone’s mind. Nobody who has not heard of it ever thought or dreamed of it. To be thought of at all, it had to happen, because the truth is beyond us. We can only stand back in wonder and worship. It was God’s experience only. We

cannot enter into it. Even more amazing than the fact that He became a Man is the overwhelming fact that He died as a Man. God experienced death for us—that the Prince of life “*might taste death for everyone*” (Hebrews 2:9). What that was like, mortals could never know.

Tis mystery all, the Immortal dies,
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
Tis mystery all, let earth adore,
And angel minds inquire no more.⁹

The Jesus in Whom We Believe

We cannot possibly appreciate the amazing privilege of believing and praying in the name of Jesus unless we meditate on the background of the Lord’s name. The Old and New Testaments explain each another. Like two witnesses, they declare what His name is. The importance is not the mere word itself; rather, it is the code word for the activity of God on earth, with much more yet to be done and known.

His name, Jesus, was decided before He came to earth. (See Matthew 1:21.) It was a common human name—others were called Jesus (see Acts 13:6), or Joshua. In order to be one of us and one with us (Immanuel), Jesus took human nature and a human name. It shows Him to be a member of our race. He belongs to us, here, and He will come back here, to where He was born. He is “*the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5) who is “*the same yesterday, today, and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).

Why This Name?

Name, as a word, is written more than one thousand times in Scripture, showing the spiritual importance of names. In Scripture, we find seven reasons for why people received their names. Several of them are connected to the naming of Jesus. His name was:

- to fulfill prophecy
- to give Him human identity
- to link man with God

- to represent the salvation as the work of God
- to signify new spiritual understanding
- and because “*He will save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

Some names were prophecies. For example, Isaiah used whole sentences for his children’s names. One was, *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* (see Isaiah 8:1), meaning, “Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.” But the name of Jesus was not a prophecy. It was a fulfillment of prophecy. In Him, all prophecy came to a head and was consummated, because He was the great one who was to come. (See Luke 24:25–27.) The first name in the New Testament is Jesus, because the New Testament is prophecy being fulfilled.

Names were sometimes changed when a person changed. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, and Naomi said, “*Call me Mara*” (Ruth 1:20). These name changes commemorated their new experiences. Saul of Tarsus—the man whose hero was the proud King Saul—became the humble Paul when he met Jesus. However the name of Jesus never changed. No experience changed Him. He came to save His people from their sins, and He still does.

Though His name was never altered, two titles were added. After His triumph on the cross, Peter announced in Jerusalem, “*God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ*” (Acts 2:36).

- Jesus is His personal name.
- Lord is His rank and office.
- Christ is His work as the one anointed to set the captives free. (See Isaiah 61:1.)

Jesus is a Hebrew name, *Joshua* (or *Yehosua*, shortened to *Yeshua*). It means “The Lord [is] salvation.” It is hidden in Isaiah 62:11, “*Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming,’*” or “your Yeshua is coming.” Jesus means Savior.

Anybody who talks about Jesus or Christianity without salvation talks nonsense. Salvation is what *Jesus* means. The living heart of the Christian faith is “*that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins*” (Acts

13:38). “Through this Man” means “through His name,” because we can be saved by “*no other name*” (Acts 4:12).

Believing in His name is the same as believing in Him, because His name crystallizes who He is. In the Psalms, the name of the Lord is spoken of in the same terms as the Lord Himself. In other words, His name is equated with His identity, as we see in Psalm 145:1–2, which states, “*I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever.*” (For more examples of this, see Psalm 20:1; 113:1–3; 115:1.)

Faith in the name of Jesus activates in us His passion and death. Faith “wires us up” to the “finished work of the cross,” and what Jesus did for us is done to us. We become what He did. His travail brought spiritual sons and daughters to birth in a spiritual “shift” or dynamic transference of believers into the position of Christ.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–6)

We are clothed with His righteousness. *The Lord is my righteousness (Yahweh Tsidkenu).*

The Prayer of Faith in His Name

Before we look at faith in the name of Jesus for prayer, we must understand that faith in His name has far wider implications. We are commanded, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Colossians 3:17). Christianity is not all prayer and Bible. It means kindness, labors of love, and ranking our neighbors as next to God in our concern. In Matthew 25, Jesus said the nations will be judged based on these practical acts of goodness, whereas some who boasted of their works and miracles of faith will be banished from His presence or be nothing. (See 1 Corinthians 13.)

Nevertheless, we are at present in pursuit of faith, and we are coming to Scripture, for “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17). The Bible is not written for people of great faith but for people who have no faith, and it is here to create and build us up in this vital way. Jesus taught His disciples to pray (see Matthew 6:6–15; Luke 11:1–4), and in so doing,

He gave us what we call the “Lord’s Prayer.” One thing is notably missing. It does not start or end with “in the name of Jesus.” It says, “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name*” (Matthew 6:9). Yet Jesus stressed prayer in His name (see John 14:14, 16:23, 24,26), and we are instructed, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Colossians 3:17).

From this, we see that saying, “We ask it in the name of Jesus,” is not essential. Using those words is a statement about our own hearts. We ourselves are *in Christ* and speak from that wonderful position. Certain expressions do not impart any power or effectiveness to our prayers or our ministry. Prayer can be silent; it can be a tear or a sigh. God heard the groaning of Israel in Egypt even though Israel had forgotten His name, and we ask *in Jesus* simply by being in Him when we believe in His name.

When we minister the Word or lay hands on the sick, we do it for Christ, because we are doing what He would do. But we take a more dynamic step. Not only do we do it on His behalf, but we do it with Him, clothed with Him, one with Him. That is what “in Jesus’ name” means.

The New Privilege

The idea of being in God was completely unknown until Christ came. The Old Testament saints, men like Abraham, Joseph, and Job, never spoke of themselves as being in God. That was an intimacy Israel never could have dared to mention. The Lord was the lofty one who inhabited eternity and before whom one trembled. Proverbs 18:10 says, “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe,*” but it was merely a figure of speech. They had no doctrine for the possibility of a person’s life being hidden with Christ in God.

And nobody prayed, “We ask in Your name” or “In Your name let this be!” Rather, here is a famous example of the way people prayed, taken from the end of Daniel’s great intercessory and petitionary prayer for Israel:

O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.
(Daniel 9:19)

Daniel did not pray in the name of the Lord. He only prayed for His name. Daniel’s standing before God was that of a righteous man in his own right, because of his faith; he did not possess the righteousness of the Redeemer. He was heard mercifully with grace as a “*man greatly beloved*” (Daniel 10:11).

In Acts 10:4, a messenger from God said to a Roman centurion, Cornelius, “*Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.*” When Cornelius heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him and those with him. They were immediately lifted into a totally different relationship and baptized in the very Spirit of God. He was in them, and they were in Him. That was a dynamic position, not a mere figure of speech.

Old Testament people pleaded their innocence or goodness; that is, they came to God in their own name, resting upon their own virtues as grounds to be heard. For example, Psalm 17:1–3 says:

Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright. You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.

And Psalm 26:1, 6 says:

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the Lord; I shall not slip....I will wash my hands in innocence; so I will go about Your altar, O Lord.

Christ taught us to pray in a new way. Obviously, the disciples had prayed before, but when they heard Jesus pray, it was like nothing they had ever known, so they asked Him to teach them to pray. In other words, they wanted Jesus to show them His way because they recognized something was different. Christ prayed and was heard *because of who He is*. So He showed them that, because of who He is, they could be heard also—in His name. This was not like David or Daniel praying in their own names. It was a *new and living way*.

When we consider all the history and the greatness and the work of Christ, and we appreciate what His name represents, then we can see why prayer in His name gives us tremendous backing. Christ Jesus represented us in the judgment and bore desolation on our behalf. He championed us, though we were a disgrace: “*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8), “*the just for the unjust*” (1 Peter 3:18). Each of us comes as one of those for whom this tremendous work was done.

No Magic

When we are in Christ, we find power in the name of Jesus. Repeating the name of Jesus over and over is no different than repeating any other word. One word

moves the hand of God no more than any another—whether it is sacred or profane. It may be wise, when ministering, to say, “in the name of Jesus,” but it is for the benefit of those standing by, to show that the glory is the Lord’s alone. When Peter healed the cripple, he said:

Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?...And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. (Acts 3:12, 16)

In other words, we can come to God in Christ’s name, but no name or word can coerce God or force Him to oblige us. That is shamanism, pronouncing magic words in order to bring about supernatural powers and spirits. God cannot be controlled.

Prayer in Jesus’ name is always to make the will of God possible. Christ taught us to pray, “*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10). He did not give us miracle formulas to manipulate the Spirit of God or to control events. Instead, when we pray, in intercession and supplication, we must seek the face of God in humility and dependence, not pronounce a name as though we were waving a wizard’s wand.

Some New Testament healings were performed without any mention of the name of Jesus. Peter’s shadow brought miracles (see Acts 5:15), and he also raised Dorcas from the dead without naming Jesus, but he did pray beforehand (see Acts 9:40). Ultimately, our expectations must be based on what Christ did, and faith brings us into relationship with Him as He works. Faith is the humble handmaid of those who do His will.

FAITH AND PRAYER

God's Presence Is Permanent

Prayer is not an interview with God that terminates when you say, “Amen.” It does not mean, “So long, Lord!” He is as much with you when you are not praying as when you are. “*I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you*” (Joshua 1:5). “*Lo, I am with you always*” (Matthew 28:20). His presence is unconditional with those who love Him.

When we gather together, someone often prays, “Lord, be present here today! Be among us!” Is this necessary? After all, He said, “*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20). The prayer, “Be with us Lord!” almost suggests He will not be with us unless we pressure Him to take notice—as Baal’s followers tried with Baal on Mount Carmel. Is this faith? Faith believes the Word of Christ. Faith does not ask Christ to fulfill promises that are unconditional. Faith takes it as done, as actualized.

Jesus did not say, “I will come into their midst,” but “*I am there in the midst.*” He does not come into a gathering of worshippers so that we can say at a certain point, “God has come among us!” He is not drawn there by our fervency or when we work up the “right atmosphere.” In fact, He does not come into our presence. We must come into His presence, “*And to Him shall be the obedience of the people*” (Genesis 49:10). That is His name—*Jehovah Shammah*, meaning, “*the Lord is there.*” He is the *Alpha*, always the beginning. He is not a will-o-the-wisp, an elusive spirit who is hard to catch, here today and gone tomorrow. No techniques or formulas are needed to generate His presence. We can obliterate the *fact* of His presence from our view by a fog of doubt, just as the vast rocky mass of Mount Everest can disappear behind a cloudbank. But He is still there.

His promise is often misunderstood. It does not mean two or three are needed for His presence but that His presence is the important factor when we do meet.

The idea is of two people sorting out their differences—He is there then, not just when we have achieved perfect harmony. It is Christ who takes priority. He is the head of the church, not the pastor. He is the chief of the church board, not the chairman. Christ is the head of the home.

This promise of Christ to be among us can also be taken as a warning. He is Lord of the Church, and when bickering, politics, intrigue, envy, place and position seeking, animosity, or outright quarrelling occurs, He is still there. If Christians gather as Christians, He is with them—whether it is convenient for Him to be there or not. We cannot get rid of Him, and there is simply nothing we can do about it. We did not ask Him to come, and we cannot ask Him to leave. We can only reckon on it, take advantage of it, or take warning of it. *“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name”* (Malachi 3:16).

Matthew 18:20 concerns our relationship with one another, particularly when one offends another and forgiveness is needed. What happens then happens in the sight of Christ Himself. It concerns two who come together to sort out their differences, with perhaps a third party as arbitrator. Christ is still to be recognized as the chief one present. Then, *“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 18:18). That verse has nothing whatsoever to do with the casting out of demons, for demons are not in mind in the entire chapter, but a forgiving attitude.

It follows that where faith grasps the promise of Christ and knows He is present, all false attitudes and animosity wither away. Faith is the key to peace and harmony.

His Presence Is Not Caused

Faith in God means faith in a present God, not a remote God who must be called back from some distant heaven. We worship a Lord who is always with us. We speak of “going to meet God in worship,” at church at a given time. If we only worship Him, we do not even reach Old Testament levels, not to mention those of the New. Jesus said we would neither in this place nor in that place worship the Father. (See John 4:21.) We do not “meet with God” as if we were keeping an appointment, trusting He will turn up. He has not been in the next street all day. Paul said, *“I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 3:14). Paul did not mean that was the way he usually worshipped; he

meant that was the way he lived. He lived worshipping Christ, because worship in Bible terms is never an occasional event; it is a permanent attitude.

Praying does not create God's presence. We pray because God is present. If He was not present, our prayers would only reach the ceiling, not the throne. And He is fully here—not just the finger of God or the face of God or a dim light shining. Some have suggested that the more we pray the greater the intensity of God's power and presence becomes. Someone even wrote that the power of God is in exact proportion to the time spent praying for it. No such suggestion is found anywhere in Scripture. Indeed, after the baptism in the Spirit, there is never any suggestion that we should pray for power. Charles Spurgeon called the presence of Christ “the Christian's only certainty.”

Faith Without Prayer

As Peter and John were going to pray, they healed a cripple on the way without praying for him. (See Acts 3.) In fact, the prayer time they were going to was cancelled because the miracle created such a commotion. Here we see they were able to heal the man before praying because Christ was with them, and they acted in faith. (See Acts 3:6, 16.)

Faith that God is with us inspires us to pray. Naturally, we want to speak to Him when we know He is listening. When people do not pray, it is because they do not believe He is listening. Jesus prayed because He had such a perfect and immediate awareness of His Father: “*Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me*” (John 11:41–42). Sometimes the Bible does not even say Jesus prayed, but says He just lifted His head and “said.”

Faith without prayer is possible, but prayer without faith is useless. Jesus said, “*When you pray, believe*” (Mark 11:24). Only the prayer of faith is effective. Prayer is not a sigh of desperation but an act of victorious faith. The ability to turn toward God and speak to Him is a victory in itself, and on that victory other victories are built.

Believe and Forget It?

Faith is the vital principle of prayer. So, once we have believed, can we stop praying and just leave it at that? Does praying the prayer of faith mean we move on and do not need to bother anymore? Isn't it a sign of unbelief if we pray again? The answer is that faith is not something we switch on for five minutes when we make a request to God. The prayer of faith sets up a faith situation

where we are standing before God. We stay in that situation or relationship until the prayer is finally answered.

The instruction from 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is: *“Pray without ceasing.”* That does not mean praying 24 hours a day and 365 days a year and everlastingly trying to think of something to pray about. It means do not quit, never let up in your appeal to God once you begin. Continuing in prayer is not a sign of unbelief but of faith. In fact, we prove we believe by continuing to pray: *“Men always ought to pray and not lose heart”* (Luke 18:1).

The Patience of Faith

Prayer is faith in action. The book of James picks out two biblical episodes as great examples of persistently believing and praying. But look first at what James 5:11, 17–18 says:

You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Elijah....prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain.

James 5:7–8 also speaks of the need for patient faith.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

When we turn to the record of Elijah’s prayer for rain (see 1 Kings 18), we see he did not ask, believe, and let it go at that. To begin with, he acted in faith by telling the king rain was coming. He told him to go have a meal and be ready because a storm was on its way. (See 1 Kings 18:41.) Then he went up to the top of Carmel and cast himself down on the ground, crouching with his head between his knees in an attitude of waiting. It does not actually say he prayed. Maybe he said no words. Prayer can be wordless, as *“The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”* (Romans 8:26). Elijah simply waited in a childlike attitude of trust and told a servant to let him know when the clouds appeared. The servant climbed to a high ridge seven times, each time seeing nothing until the last time, when a small cloud appeared to indicate a coming storm. As far as Elijah was concerned, he was simply waiting. He had his foot in the door of heaven so it would not shut. If the servant had needed to go up fifty times, he still would have waited. That is the patience,

or persistence, of faith.

James gives us another illustration—the patience of Job. In what way was Job patient? Many have said he was patient with his sufferings, but the third chapter of Job in no way sounds like that. It begins:

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job spoke, and said: “May the day perish on which I was born, and the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived.’” (Job 3:1–3)

He continues in this strain for twenty-six verses, in which one thing is very prominently missing—any sign of patience with suffering. In fact, the Bible as a whole does not display marked toleration of suffering. Unlike all other religions, which demand resignation, Bible faith protests against illnesses and pain. In the first five books of the New Testament—that is more than half of it —Jesus leads an attack upon physical suffering as the work of the devil. Christ displayed no patience with the world’s misery.

Job’s patience was not with his afflictions but with God. This great man showed not a flicker of mistrust in that direction. Puzzlement yes, questions yes, frustration yes, but not agitated criticism of God. He uses some of the greatest phrases we know:

Then let come on me what may. (Job 13:13)

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. (Job 13:15)

For I know that my Redeemer lives...and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25–26)

When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)

The Lord later said Job had spoken rightly of Him: “*For you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has*” (Job 42:7).

Many ask about sickness and suffering. Why does God permit it? Why has God not yet healed this one? What they need is a healing—not an explanation. Explanations do not help very much if we have a toothache! Job gives us the true answer to suffering—faith, continuing to believe God. To do that, we need patience, which is the quality of faith.

Not only James but also Jesus spoke of the patience of faith. In Luke 18, a judge who did not care about God or man brushed aside a widow who needed justice. But she kept coming back until he decided he had better deal with her or she would never stop pestering him. As Jesus said, if an unjust judge would act like that, how much more “*shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day*

and night to Him, though He bears long with them” (Luke 18:7). This does not compare God with an unjust judge, who can be persuaded by sheer importunity. It simply means that after we have prayed, we need patience, “*patient continuance in doing good*” as Paul says in Romans 2:7.

Patience is used thirty-two times in the New Testament, as just one of many expressions encouraging our perseverance in faith and prayer. Romans 12:12 says we should be “*rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.*” God is patient with us; He is “*the God of patience*” (Romans 15:5), and 2 Thessalonians 3:5 speaks of “*the patience of Christ.*”

God always hears prayer. He cannot make it obvious, but He hears every time we move our lips. He cannot send us an acknowledgement, such as, “Your prayer is heard, and is receiving attention.” It may seem He is not listening or doing anything. We should “*cry out day and night to Him,*” as Jesus says, but we should also display ordinary confidence that He will not let us down. Healings do not take place when people have to crank up their faith to spark off a brief flash or when faith flops into the healing service, half dead.

People come who are sick and have prayed but have not been healed. God has heard their prayers but is waiting for a real live link of faith to connect to His power. The Lord chooses whom He wills to provide that link. Healing follows—not always through the evangelist’s prayer but through the prayers God already had heard.

This is how the gifts of healings operate. God does nothing without prayer. When our voices have reached His ears, God looks for someone to carry that healing to whoever needs it. That is the only “gift of healing” mentioned in Scripture. It is the gift of healing to the sick person, conveyed from God through ministering hands. An evangelist, for example, becomes His errand boy, somebody with faith to say, “Here is the healing for which you asked God. He has sent me with it.”

Faith is given to us because we live in the dimension of time, not in eternity, and because God has to take the time factor into account when performing His wonders. They may not always be instant. Some people come for quick and cheap healing to save them the time and trouble doctors and hospitals require. They go home full of criticism if God does not fall over Himself to oblige them when they were good enough to patronize Him.

The same people will submit to medical authorities and spend hours, days, or weeks in the hospital, take medicine three times a day, regularly for years, and yet never find the time to seek the face of God. This was the sin of King Asa.

(See 2 Chronicles 16:12.) A persistent, living faith—pressing through in prayer—is, of course, far from their minds. God either provides a convenient, hassle-free cure, or they give up on God. Few people appear at a church for healing more than once. They assume that, if it does not work the first time, it will not work the next time, and if it does work, they have no need to come back anyway. They quit, so God lets them quit.

Praying Ourselves Out of Faith?

Is it possible to pray ourselves out of faith? Yes, if our prayers are expressions of worry more than acts of faith triumphant. We can pray ourselves out of faith if we did not really believe in the first place. Prayer does not generate faith. The increase of faith comes from the Word of God, as the Spirit opens it to our hearts—not as we learn it from books. Faith is not a surgical implant from the celestial world. If we had real faith at the start, it does not need to get better. It will not get worse by praying if we began without any!

One thing Scripture is most positive about is that God always hears prayer. However, that does not mean He must always acquiesce, as if He was afraid of offending us. He is not there to do our will. We are here only so that His will may be done. He is the Lord God, maker of heaven and earth, not the genie of the lamp, to whom we say the right words so He will dance and attend on us. We find no miracle in words, in mouthing certain formulae, as do the heathen, or in using the name of Jesus like a mantra. Those who fear Him will be heard.

FAITH AND FEAR

Fear is natural and good; so are eating and drinking. They are normal parts of our make-up. They are also essential to human life, including fear. But none of them is always good. Some people have a compulsion to eat, some have an addiction for drink, some are obsessed with sex, and some are possessed with fears. To be gluttons, drunks, or immoral people means we are guilty, and we are just as guilty when we allow fears to dominate our lives.

We can be hooked on fear. What then? Only fear can get us off the hook. It is the only known antidote to the cobra's bite of obsessive alarm. Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid; only believe*" (Luke 8:50). Why does He say "*only*"? Because that is all we can do—we can only believe when that curse threatens us. It is also all we need to do. It might be a case of great fear, and little faith leaves us in fearful danger. Fear and worry are killers.

In the Bible we learn some fear is good and some is bad. The books of Psalms and Proverbs speak of "the fear of the Lord" as a virtue fourteen times. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Psalm 111:10), "*a fountain of life*" (Proverbs 14:27), and "*riches and honor and life*" (Proverbs 22:4). Yet 1 John 4:18 says, "*Fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*"

In Exodus 20:20, we find both aspects: "*Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.*" How can fear be both good and bad? The answer depends on what or whom we fear. To fear God is a wholesome attitude. When we fear the devil, it is a sign we do not fear God, which means we have no faith.

Analysis of Fear

The essence of fear is being faced with something greater than ourselves, some

greater person or Being or intelligence or power. Our fear lies with whatever we see as the greatest thing. If we see God as the greatest, we will fear God more than the devil or men. If we fear the devil the most, we think of him as being greater than God.

The fear of the Lord is good. The Lord is great—great in significance, great in wisdom, and great in power. Fear of God has a salutary effect upon our lives because it is a healthy fear, producing good. We will not put a foot wrong when we walk before the Lord. If we know He holds us in His hands, we will “*hate evil*,” as Proverbs 8:13 says. Fearing God makes us godly.

We have a healthy respect for God because of His overwhelming power, but also because of His unmovable will. Nothing changes His purposes. He is great enough to crush us, but great enough also to show us mercy. The fear of the Lord is the only good fear. Other fears are bad—worry, anxiety, dread, and panic, as well as living in mortal dread. That is a terrible state of mind, but there is an answer—to fear God and to trust Him.

Analysis of Sin

Sin in Scripture is tied to unbelief. When we have no faith in God, we have no fear of God. Unless we fear God, we will certainly be sinful. If God is treated with contempt, His judgments and holiness will be mocked. No belief in God means no restraint on evil.

The cause of any major rise in crime is the loss of belief in the judgment of God. That is the ultimate sanction. Abraham went to Gerar and said, “*Surely the fear of God is not in this place*” (Genesis 20:11). So he was afraid they would kill him to take his wife.

If we scorn God’s power and greatness, we deprive ourselves. God has shown us what He is, not just so we will say, “Aren’t you wonderful God!” It is not to impress us but to bless us. This is what He is toward us. Unbelief cuts the power off. Paul said that he prayed constantly for the Ephesians so this would not happen. “[I pray] *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know...the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe*” (Ephesians 1:18–19).

Nobody adds anything to his or her life by unbelief. It is a dead negative. Faith particularly acts against the fears that populate the future and cause a thousand other fears to haunt us. We either fear God or we fear everything else.

Without faith, people turn everywhere for assurance, even in the most useless

and pathetic directions. People turn even to the quiet stars, studying the signs of the Zodiac, looking for signs of good luck, casting around like shipwrecked mariners for a rock on which to cling. Isaiah observed all this nearly three thousand years ago and said, *“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?”* (Isaiah 8:19)

The man who fears God fears nothing. This is what the Lord says, *“Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them”* (Jeremiah 10:2). We recognize God in all His awesome greatness and His power to save us, and nothing has greater power.

Fearless Faith

The apostle Paul went to the areas of Europe where no Christian believers existed and preached the gospel in an open attack upon the vast, entrenched culture of paganism. The emperor himself was the chief guardian of all the gods, yet the apostle of Christ challenged the whole ancient world and rejected the strength and impressive array of a cruel world empire. Instead, Paul knew his God *“always leads us in triumph”* (2 Corinthians 2:14).

This unknown Christian, a lone little Jew, found Europe and Asia full of fear—fear of spirits and omens, fear of their vengeful and moody gods, fear of the heavens above them and the depths beneath them, fear of the future, fear of the mysterious world around them. Its millions bowed in spiritual darkness under a morbid dread of death. Paul’s fear of God placed him on higher ground, and he said, *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21). These are the triumphs of faith!

Writing to Rome, the capital that exercised the iron hand of world domination, he said:

I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

The New Testament usually uses only one Greek word for fear, *phobeo*. Jesus said, *“Do not have phobia, have faith.”* Jesus had no room for cowards. He said, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

Once or twice, another word for fear is used, the Greek word *deilos*, which

means fearful, timid, or even cowardly. Jesus said, “*Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?*” (Matthew 8:26). We read in 2 Timothy 1:7, “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” The word *deilos* is translated “*cowardly*” in Revelation 21:8, which seems correct, because it joins *deilos* people with unbelievers, murderers, those who commit abominations, and other major sinners.

Benaiah went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion—a rare act of courage. His decision to face a desperate and hungry lion in midwinter, in a pit where Benaiah could not run away, revealed he was truly one of David’s men and, like David, a man of faith. Yet Jesus found His own disciples so mistrustful of Him that they became cowardly in the storm. He was appalled by such unbelief. They knew better, and one of them, Peter, later got the measure of the devil. (See Matthew 16:23.) James said, “*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7).

Fearful Unbelief

The Bible’s greatest illustration of fearful unbelief and fearless faith lasted forty years. It was like watching a forty-act drama on the stage, depicting the total bankruptcy of faith. We still see them in our mind’s eye—those camping tribes of Israel. Many a time their wanderings took them close to the border of the Promised Land. The problem was not that they did not believe they could go over. They knew it was their right, for God had given the land to them. They were thoroughly convinced. Their faith that far was perfect, but their faith had a fatal flaw—the worm of fear was at the heart of it. Their faith was useless while they feared, which is why most of them never reached the Promised Land. They panicked. They murmured about their lot but did not have enough faith to change it. They whined when they could have dined.

The episode of the spies resulted in ten of them unbelieving and two full of faith. This is probably a normal average—two out of twelve believe and get what God has for them. The rest wish and die. The Marxist communists used to mock religion saying, “Work and pray, live on hay, and you’ll get pie in the sky when you die.” They promised pie on earth, but it never came. Those who are promised pie in the sky and believe what Christ said are the ones who find God gives them pie now, and then they do their best to make sure that other people get some pie as well.

Depression

When Jesus said, “*Do not be afraid; only believe*” (Luke 8:50), it was a profound analysis of this emotion. Normally we say, “Do not be afraid, be brave, have courage!” Jesus did not say just, “Do not be afraid.” He knew very well that fear is part of man’s make-up. He said, “*Do not be afraid; only believe.*” During periods of melancholy when, as Scripture says, “*neither sun nor stars appeared*” (Acts 27:20), trust in God is the anchor of the soul. “*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You*” (Psalm 56:3). That is the time to trust.

Unfortunately, some are by nature nervous and prone to depression and even panic. We see this in many famous examples from history, such as Tchaikovsky; Thomas Carlyle, the eminent author; and William Cowper, the poet and author of the famous Olney Hymns. Even the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, knew the grip of depression and would make his students laugh because otherwise he said he would weep.

The writer of Psalm 42 may have been temperamentally afflicted in the same way, but again faith came to his aid. He said, “*My tears have been my food day and night...why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?*” He seems to have no rational explanation for his depression. However, he knew where to get strength. He spoke to himself, “*Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him*” (Psalm 42:5).

Faith Is Not a Feeling

This illustrates a major lesson—faith is not a feeling. When danger comes, fear is inevitable. When our bodily chemistry sets up a sense of impending disaster or we suffer heavy blows and our circumstances are oppressive and dark or when pain and illness sit with us at the fireside—fear and alarm come as a natural cause and effect. What then does faith do? It takes the shackles from our ankles, and we challenge their paralyzing grip and go ahead anyway. With God, fear will not stop us. We overcome.

If we are believers, nothing can alter it, no matter what hammers and bruises us. Jesus said His followers were to give their lives for Him, but “*not a hair of your head shall be lost*” (Luke 21:18). You—the real you—believes God. The sea’s surface is ruffled, but the depths are still. Faith operates without emotional reactions. It secretly imparts strength of mind and peace of spirit, so you do not go under but over. Faith gets us off the hook of fear.

Faith is not just for Sunday but for life. Faith is not just for transplanting mountains (see Matthew 21:21) but for living. God gives us grace to live, if we believe, and the just will live by faith. Faith is the plus of life.

FAITH AND THE DEVIL

The devil, supreme commander of the forces of darkness, has numerous *fiery darts*, against which the Christian has one all-purpose superior counter-weapon—faith in God. “*No weapon formed against you shall prosper*” (Isaiah 54:17).

The question about the devil is, “What is he really after?” What does he hope to gain by evil? Possibly nothing much now and not for very long! He is evil—the opposite of God, who is good—and he just does what he does. He had hopes in the beginning. Once we know the underlying facts about satanic activity, we know how faith will apply.

Satan Only Ever Had One Motive—Domination

God did not make him a devil. He created him a splendid being (see Ezekiel 28:12–15), and Satan then made himself the devil—the *diabolus*. Originally, he rose up wanting the honors of God. (See Isaiah 14:12–15.) He tried to establish his own throne and seduce all creatures in heaven and earth to bow the knee to him. Many in heaven did so. They became his cohorts, his hosts of dark angels.

God’s solution to Satan was strange. He established the physical earth and created men and women. As fragile creatures, mere flesh and blood, they looked like an easy target that could be easily overcome, easily deceived, and easily dominated. And so they proved to be—as they were quickly seduced and placed under Satan’s heel. They multiplied, and he captivated them in their ignorance, enslaving them at the beginning of the race. Soon the earth was filled with violence.

But God was by no means out-thought. Before these events took place, His eternal scheme was prepared. It was so fantastic that the twisted thinking of the devil could never have suspected it and probably cannot grasp it even now. These defenseless, short-lived creatures—men and women—were God’s master

plan. They were to be the instruments of satanic destruction: “*God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty*” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

The means would be the very fragility of human flesh: “*The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8). The Son of Man came, bleeding when wounded (as any man bleeds) and bearing even a human name, Jesus. By his gentle submission, he was “*led as a lamb to the slaughter*” (Isaiah 53:7), and the decisive battle was won. An everlasting victory was gained. The scars He bears forever are the pledge and assurance of salvation to a world no longer without hope.

Satan had schemed that every knee would bow to him and confess him as lord. It seemed so easy on this planet, as he exercised weapons of crushing might and war. Instead, this Man, Jesus, came. Though He was so easily mutilated and taken to death in the flesh, He conquered all in spirit. Let hell do its worst, it was still no match for Jesus. Not at the name of Satan, but at the name of Jesus, today a thousand million bow, and soon every knee and every tongue will confess Him as Lord. Satan is doomed.

Meanwhile, the vast ambition of Satan has flooded the world with a multitude of evils. The evil spirit let loose in the world works out in human lives until Christ delivers them. As Ephesians 2:1–2 says:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

Occultism

The aims of the devil continue simply because he cannot help himself. He is full of cunning, and he gratifies his desires by the domination of human lives. He injects his spirit, the curse of sin, into the world like the poison of a serpent. From this source come the intractable problems with which politicians, statesmen, social experts, and the rest of us struggle.

He has many strategies of battle. Among them is the occult, which is a direct physical manifestation. It includes witchcraft, casting spells, pronouncing curses, possession, and various supernatural manifestations, visions, apparitions, fortune telling, impersonating the dead, and other phenomena of the séance.

When Satan resorts to playing physical tricks (which are never of any use), using his human agents, he is used himself. The devil has to fall into human

hands to assert his magic. His dignity has to go along with the cruel practices and wild antics of the spirits of men.

I have been in many areas where the occult is part of the culture. Witch doctors using charms have had official license alongside modern doctors. Even football matches in modern African states are reported as the scene of arguments about spells cast on goal posts. As with the ancient gods of pagan times, these spirits are never trusted as benevolent, and the prevention of marauding spirits requires a considerable industry of superstitions, fetishes, charms, amulets, and the rest. They bring nobody peace or assurance.

Yet, as we have proven constantly, the gospel “*weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds*” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

In some countries, some people seek supernatural powers and want powerful spirits to enter and possess them. They put themselves through extraordinary physical ordeals but do not succeed often. It is not so easy to be possessed. God has not made people as vulnerable as that—frail as they are.

This is contrary to what many teach today—that Christians often carry demons with them. Every conceivable ailment and weakness has been named as a demonic manifestation. It is no great Christian message of joy to be told one is infested with devils! As a result, some come weekly for exorcism, as if they pick up demons like bacteria and need to be disinfected regularly.

Yet, it is true that the devil is like a roaring lion. He brings down any weak runner in the herd and makes a meal of such people. Opportunity tempts the tempter. If he can resist anything, it certainly is not temptation, and demonic possession is a wickedness in which the powers of darkness find perverted satisfaction.

Once occultism grips a nation, it destroys all rationality. It can begin with silly fascinations with the Ouija board and bending spoons and forks. What use is that in our world of weeping multitudes? In the West, one hears of haunting, poltergeist, knockings on walls, “messages” from the dead, and so on. I almost think these trivialities and antics must be appointed to the less intelligent denizens of Satan’s underworld. But they are initiatory dangers, opening the mind to the fascination of evil forces.

Against all these sordid dangers, the Christian carries the shield of faith, which is bullet proof. We enjoy immunity from devil control and enjoy salvation, victory, and freedom. We can be bold and impregnable through faith in the redemptive blood of Christ. For this reason, I pursue the battle right to the

enemy's camp. Demonic forces hold sway over thousands, but I challenge the dark hosts of hell with the cross of Christ. Of course, this makes me a target for curses and spells. Naked witch doctors have danced around my hotel all night to bring their evil powers upon me and stop the Word of God. Their efforts have had such a notable lack of success that I need hardly record them!

I live in the faith of God's covenant in Psalm 91:

- *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* (verse 1)
- *Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling.* (verses 9–10)
- *You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.* (verse 13)

The serpent is the devil. (See Genesis 3:1, 14; Revelation 12:9; 20:2.) When we face him, we can confidently and joyfully sing:

Victory! Victory! Blessed blood-bought victory!

Victory! Victory! Victory all the time!

As Jehovah liveth, strength Divine He giveth.

Unto those who know Him—victory all the time!¹⁰

Satanic Hindrance

Meanwhile, Satan has a strategy. Occult manifestations are an excellent device to divert Christians from their real job of world evangelism. The occult is a fringe evil in the world, which contains far greater wrongs—the answer to which is the preaching of the Word of God. The occult is not even the cause of world problems. Greed is a much greater cause: “*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6:10).

The devil sees what the church is doing. It awoke a century ago to evangelize the whole world. Naturally, as we fulfill the Great Commission, we are likely to see satanic opposition of every possible kind. We have suffered the world's two great wars. Foul anti-Christian movements have arisen, such as communism and fascism. World economic fears have distressed every nation. And now, secularism and rationalism are producing the inevitable rise of crime and social

upheaval. *“The devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time”* (Revelation 12:12).

Vast issues confront everyone, but those who believe will not only be saved but will bring salvation to the despairing world. But in many areas, supernatural manifestations of the devil take place to distract Christians. Satan puts on a firework display from hell, and some workers in the harvest stop to stare and to go hunting for demons. It is a sideshow—just like Sanballat’s attempts to distract Nehemiah from building (see Nehemiah 4:1)—and we cannot afford to make these distractions the center of our work. We are here to make sure everyone we can reach knows the gospel. Jesus cast out the spirits with His word, and that is all the time it should take.

“We are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Paul and Silas in Philippi refused for days to be drawn into direct conflict with a demon spirit. Finally, they thought it best to cast the spirit of divination out of the possessed girl. As a result, their successful evangelism in the city was cut short, and they had to leave.

In our own campaign services, spirits manifest themselves. It is the same trick, to distract attention from the preaching of the gospel. We do not stop preaching to carry out a few exorcisms. I am an evangelist, a harvester for God, and I do not stop the combine harvester to catch a mouse. When victims begin to divert attention from the Word being preached, they are removed from the gathering. Personal workers deal with these people away from the crowd, expelling the spirits.

Exorcism is our duty, but it is only one element in preaching the gospel to every creature. Neither exorcism nor healing is the whole gospel. We follow the example of Jesus in such things, and His earthly mission was the kingdom of God. He established His purpose with a direct onslaught on the works of the devil, such as had never been seen until that time, and He called us, like Him, to be fishers of men, not demon hunters. Sadly, some Christians seem more demon conscious than Jesus conscious. They talk far more about what devils do than what God does. Exorcism has a subtle danger, infecting some people with pride, which causes them to talk of the spirits fleeing at their command. Jesus warned us in Luke 10:20: *“In this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”*

We could not name all the devices of wickedness. They occupy the entire world press every day. Having done all, we stand in faith, and when the world falls to pieces, the Christian survives. The victory is our faith.

Unbelief

In Ephesians, we have Paul's vivid picture of the Christian church's armor: *"Taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"* (Ephesians 6:16). Obviously, if faith can shield us from Satan's arrows, he will try to knock the shield from our hands. If he cannot do it completely, he will try to trick us into dropping our faith-guard for a moment. Or he will try to shatter the shield, leaving us with only scraps and tatters of faith. Without faith, we are open to deadly personal damage morally, psychologically, and spiritually.

Jesus quoted the Bible in His direct encounter with the devil in the wilderness. That is our example, but not without faith. The Pharisees and scribes knew Scripture well enough in their way, but Jesus said, *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). The reason was, as we read in Hebrews 4:2, the word *"was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith."* Unless faith in God comes with the Word, we can throw the whole Bible at the devil, and he will only laugh. *"This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith"* (1 John 5:4). It also quenches the burning arrows of the enemy.

This book is dedicated to the purpose of creating, strengthening, and building up our faith in God and His Word. It is the deepest need in the world, the open secret of its future. Religion once a week is better than nothing—even if diluted—but the cure of the world's ills calls for the essence of the gospel. A life lived in the living God emboldens us, firms the shape of our character, tightens our resolve, and gives us the daring to live above the mundane. Faith in God is a spring of crystal-cleansing goodness, flushing the gutters of society and disinfecting the sinks of human foulness and wickedness. People of faith have a higher value effect than people of business or of genius. People of faith are the real warriors against this world's wrongs, as one convert today can prevent a war tomorrow. Faith represents trouble for the lords of wickedness. Imagine a scene in the council chambers of hell where the prince of darkness stirs up his princes and powers, saying, "We must find an answer to the number one problem, faith. It is the super weapon against us. We must spike it and sabotage it at all costs. This kingdom can never make headway against the kingdom of God as long as the simplest person goes on trusting in God."

The powers of darkness concoct many a scheme to overthrow or by-pass our Maginot Line of faith: *"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong"*

(1 Corinthians 16:13), and “*Fight the good fight of faith.*” We find out what that fight of faith is in 1 Timothy 6:9–12:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Many of our struggles come from the world and the flesh, as well as the devil. Recurring temptations perhaps arise with the pressures of the world and even our own nature; in other words, we tempt ourselves. James 1:14 says that “*each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*” As for the devil, James 4:7 later says, “*Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” James then goes on to tell us how to resist the devil:

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:8–10)

Peter also describes a similar method:

Be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility...Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Peter 5:5, 8–10)

This is where the battle is—in us. We overcome the devil by guarding ourselves with the shield of faith, throwing our trust upon God and, therefore, giving the devil no place in our lives. What is the use of expelling demons if we are full of pride in doing so? I repeat again, and on purpose, the warning of Jesus to His disciples: “*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20).

Should we fail and sin, blaming an indwelling demon will not do. If we are not responsible for our own actions, we should be lodged in a mental security

hospital. When Paul deals with personal failures, he never mentions the devil or exorcism. He says we are to put our sinful habits into reverse. “*Let him who stole steal no longer*” (Ephesians 4:28), keep the Ten Commandments, give generously, pay revenue taxes, and so forth:

Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:12–14)

“*This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*” (1 John 5:4). When pastors deal with moral failure by exorcism instead of by discipline and rebuke, they are far away from the New Testament. “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:20)—no excuses or blame is laid on a demon. Some think Ananias and Sapphira were compelled by a demon to lie to the Holy Spirit, but no such suggestion exists in the story. Peter did not recommend them to seek deliverance but rebuked them for their wickedness, and they died on the spot. (See Acts 5:1–10.)

Sin has one remedy, “*Repent and believe*” (Mark 1:15). And we have one answer to the work of the devil—“*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony*” (Revelation 12:11).

10. Leila N. Morris, “Victory All the Time,” 1901.

PART 8

FAITH AND THE SHUT DOOR

What this book teaches about faith is illustrated throughout the Bible in many stories, including the story of the notable woman of Shunem in 2 Kings 4. She was notable for only one reason—her faith. Her husband was not wealthy; he worked in the fields. Neither the King nor the head of the Israelite army knew her (see verse 13); that was not her scene. Her vision was far greater. She was much happier to be known by Elisha, the man of God. He was her kind. She “belonged to that lot,” as the world often says of believers. The alternative “lot” will pay large sums to sit at the same table as royalty. The great woman did not even want the notice of the king or the army leaders.

She was like many people today who travel hundreds of miles to meet a real man of God but do not bother to look out the window to see a much-married Hollywood star across the street. Faith totally elevated this great woman’s values and interests. She sought out and had eyes for only true greatness, which is always of God, and she was rewarded. Her spiritual insight recognized a man of God when she saw one—Elisha. (See 2 Kings 4:9.) She also sensed Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, was a fraud. (See 2 Kings 4:26, 29–31.) She saw first what Elisha saw much later.

The Shut Door

In answer to this woman’s faith, God gave her a son. (See 2 Kings 4:17.) But while he was still a boy, he went with his father to the field at harvest time and possibly had sunstroke. A man brought him back to his mother, but at noon, he died in her arms.

Now began the patience and process of faith in two people—the woman and the prophet. First, she put the boy on the prophet’s bed and “*shut the door upon him, and went out*” (2 Kings 4:21). In 2 Kings 13:21, we read that a dead man rose to

life when his corpse was put in the tomb of Elisha. Yet nothing happened for the woman's little boy when she put him on the living prophet's bed with living faith. The Bible emphasizes the fact that "*she shut the door upon him.*" In other words, she shut it on the fact of death and opened her heart to the fact of almighty God.

This is "*the door of faith,*" as Acts 14:27 calls it. Christ also hinted at something special by mentioning a door:

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:6)

That is a revelation about God—He is "*in secret.*" And the door of faith is the only way to access Him. In John 14:19, Jesus said, "*The world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.*" Earlier, He had said, "*I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come*" (John 7:33–34). God is found in the secret place—not sitting around wherever, accessible to any casual visitor.

When the Shunammite woman shut the door, she did it in recognition of the way to reach out to God. That room represented Elisha, and Elisha represented the Lord. The shut door, for all believers, carries the same significance. It is a symbol of a secret world, unknown to the unbelieving world. God has not disappeared. He waits behind the closed door, and in our hand is the key to open it—faith.

The woman then asked her husband to saddle the donkey so she could quickly go to the man of God. He asked why, but she said, "*It is well*" (2 Kings 4:23). How could she say, "*It is well*"? Her son was dead! How could she say that without even telling her husband? She believed, but she knew he would not, and he might have interfered with the faith process.

Before she reached the prophet, Elisha recognized her coming and sent Gehazi to ask her, "*Is it well with the child?*" (2 Kings 4:26). Elisha knew how precious the boy was to his mother. But even to Gehazi, she said nothing. She had infinitely more trust in God, whom she could not see, than in this man whom she could see. She did not commit herself to him, but instead remarked, "*It is well*" (verse 26). Her simple conviction was that because of God it was all right. When she came to Elisha, Gehazi tried to push her away, but Elisha wouldn't allow it. Like Gehazi, the devil will always try to push us away from hope. Then the prophet admitted the Lord had revealed nothing to him regarding her trouble (He

didn't know the boy was dead). That meant he had no previous supernatural events to build up any expectations she had.

The Fight of Faith

When Elisha knew the boy was dead, he sent his own staff with Gehazi to lay it upon the child's face. The woman had no faith in that, even if Elisha did, because she did not trust Gehazi. She refused to leave Elisha. Eventually, the prophet got up and followed her, and they met Gehazi returning, who said there was no sound or response when he placed the staff on the boy's face. He was not awakened. Time had obviously passed.

Elisha eventually reached the house and saw the child *"lying dead on his bed"* (2 Kings 4:32). He went in and also *"shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord"* (verse 33). The bed and the staff had worked no wonder. Now what? He tried again. He stretched out his body on top of the boy till the child's cold flesh became warm, but natural warmth brought no life. Only God could transfer His life to the boy, not Elisha. Elisha next got up and walked up and down, praying more, but still nothing happened.

He had done everything possible. What should he do? He could have opened that closed door and said, "I am sorry, madam, but it looks useless. I have done everything I know that usually works, but the Lord has taken your boy." But he did not! He simply did what he had done before, stretching himself on the boy—and *"then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes"* (2 Kings 4:35).

The Opened Door

Until then, Elisha had allowed nobody behind that shut door. Now he called Gehazi, and Gehazi called the mother. *"So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out"* (2 Kings 4:37)—that is, out of the death chamber and the prophet's own room.

Believing God, the woman had refused to accept the death of her son. He had been born to her by Elisha's word of knowledge (see 2 Kings 4:15–16), and as far as she was concerned, he could not be taken from her. She had grounds for faith when she saw him dead, but she would not look on the boy dead any more. She *"shut the door"* until he was in her arms, alive, as she believed he would be.

That woman had incredible faith, even when the child died on her lap. And Elisha expected a swift response; their faith was positive all the way through. Yet for both Elisha and the Shunammite, it was not a routine act of faith—"I have

prayed the prayer of faith.” They carried on doing what they should behind that closed door until God answered.

How many prayers are not answered because people stop praying too soon? They make an experimental gesture or two with no great expectations of success. If things do not come crackling to life, they want no further bother; they will find somebody else to help instead of God. The reason so many older folk are found in church is because they have had time to search and to discover that nobody else can help; only one door exists.

The way to God, Christ the door, opens even at a child’s touch of faith. But otherwise, it is as we read in Revelation 3:7–8:

He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.

That is—no one can shut or open the door unless he possesses the key of faith.

FAITH AND MY GOD

In an earlier chapter, we compared faith to a power wiring system. Faith is not power in itself, but it does link us with the power grid of heaven.

Power for the Anonymous

However, there is something else. Like our electricity, we can switch on faith no matter who we are. In our homes, we can turn on the lights or a kitchen appliance no matter who we are. Nobody comes through and demands, “Who are you? What right have you to use our power?” Spiritually, it is the same. The power, blessing, and promises of God are open to all who believe without question, rank, or qualification. All we need is faith.

A woman was healed of an issue of blood (see Luke 8:43–44) as she secretly touched Christ and drew on His healing virtue. He did not know who had touched Him, but when she came forward, He said to her, “*Your faith has made you well.*” His healing power is simply available to any who make the faith contact.

Peter had to learn the same thing, even after being with Jesus for three years. God’s contract with the human race contains a glorious non-discriminatory clause. So when Peter met “*a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household*” (Acts 10:1), who was completely outside of Israeli territory, he found God had answered his prayers, too. It astonished Peter, a strict Jew. He said, “*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (Acts 10:34–35).

That is the wonderful character of the Christian faith and of the Lord Himself. But for the outsider, it is completely different. When Jesus met strangers, He said, “Do not have phobia, have faith.” (See Mark 5:36.) Other than faith, the

price of admission into the kingdom and all its assets is nothing. The gospel gathers in and embraces everyone.

Elitism

Faith is the passport, the visa, and the entry fee into the kingdom and all its resources. We do not gain these through the rules of any organization. Nobody has a right to lord it over believers and bend them through some little door of their own into the blessings of God, dictating what their lives must be. There is no need. Faith alone is the opener, not a life conforming to somebody's ideas of what is right and wrong. Some exercise this oppressive control and disguise it as care. Yet we are each responsible for our own lives and cannot shuffle off praise or blame onto somebody else who told us what to do.

Religious groups that require personal submission to a leader are cults, not churches. A church contains all sorts of people at every degree of spiritual progress, and the only pressure should be the exhortation to heed the Word of God. If church members begin to bow to a leader's personal orders, it is a creeping death; it is cultism. We find danger when any person is lifted up as having a higher-than-normal relationship with God. As Jesus said, "*You are all brethren*" (Matthew 23:8).

A cult is a contradiction of the character of Christianity. Instead of faith, it substitutes obligations and obedience to the demands of the leaders. Yet liberty is the essence of Christ's gift to humankind. A cult is elitist, but Jesus and the gospel are all-embracing, all-inclusive, and never exclusive.

Twice, Jesus said, "*One is your Teacher, the Christ*" (Matthew 23:8,10). Yet even He Himself, the true Master, never once interfered with the ordinary decisions of His followers. He left their own practical affairs to their own wisdom. Christ gave no orders, and He was not a dictator. He told nobody where they should live or work, where they should go and when, what to do with their money or property, or whom they should marry. His disciples serve Him with love and would have done anything for Him, but He never presumed upon them or took advantage of it.

In fact, one time He even said, "*Who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?*" (Luke 12:14). The original word for *disciple* in Scripture means "a learner or follower," and it has nothing to do with discipline and regimentation or rules and commands. Jesus only taught disciples, and He never disciplined anybody or imposed any penalty or pressure. And He never threatened exclusion from the band of His followers. His comprehensive rule was simply, "*He who is not with*

Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Luke 11:23). Thus, *disciple* is not really an appropriate translation, as it suggests *discipline*, which is foreign to Christ’s ideal. It is all of faith.

Christianity has an unconditional “welcome” above its doors for the storm-tossed, the broken in spirit, and the inadequate. It is the arm of God’s love thrown around those who have given up on themselves, those whom the world has given up on, and those who feel they do not have what it takes. “*If you would believe you would see the glory of God*” (John 11:40).

Christ can make us—we who otherwise would never make it. In the Gospels, we see Him coming open-faced and open-armed. To Him, there was no such thing as a nobody or a social reject, no such thing as riffraff. After all, He came for lost sheep. To women, who were treated as sub-species in some eastern countries (even as they are now), Christ gave great honor.

Jesus said, “*I always do those things that please Him [the Father]*” (John 8:29). What had He seen the Father do? He had seen God stoop over the wretched tribes in Egypt—those Israelite nobodies, seen as expendables—and pick them up and make them great. Jesus did the same thing. He chose fishermen, not princes, to be His ambassadors. The Gospels again and again show Him meeting the unwanted and giving them a place. His outreach to the discarded is a moving part of the gospel story. Jesus is with the “lost” and the “last.” The lost He finds, and to the last He says, “*The last will be first*” (Matthew 20:16).

Same Coin, but the Other Side

When we spoke of power, we said anyone could switch it on, and that is true. It is also true that in Christ everyone is someone—even the guilty thief on the cross. Christ never treated people as “the masses.” The power station companies on earth treat us all anonymously. We are just unknown consumers. It means only a tiny flicker on the generating dials when we switch on a light. It is a blind link.

But switching by faith into spiritual resources is not a blind link. We can all come, but we are all instantly recognized by name. God says, “*I have even called you by your name; I have named you*” (Isaiah 45:4). And Jesus said, “[The shepherd] *calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*” (John 10:3). Some people talk about loving humankind, but they hate the person next door. Jesus came to save the world *and* loved even His enemies.

To fully grasp this simple truth, we must understand this fundamental reality: Scripture aims at changing the nations of the whole world, but it mainly tells us

of God's dealings with individuals, like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, the kings, and the prophets. Jesus did not preach sermons in hopes of having a good effect generally. He chose people to get on with the task at hand. The Gospels spotlight many very ordinary individuals, even nameless people, and they become keys to spiritual truth.

The point to note is this—God not only deals with us as individuals, but He chooses us. He singles us out, just as He singled out Israel. All that God does is important; it is never trivial or incidental. Everything in nature, down to the dancing particles of the atom, moves in accordance with an ultimate divine plan, and the whole movement of creation works out the divine will. When we are chosen, God is directly and personally intervening as part of His eternal process. It has that kind of significance. We have a vital place in the divine purpose, and faith puts us there.

Israel as a nation was chosen. Other nations were not, and they chose their god or gods, patronizing Baal, Ashteroth, Molech, or Ahmun. But *Yahweh* chose Israel; they did not choose Him. Israel was the people of God, and they belonged to Him. Other gods were the gods of nations, and the gods belonged to the people, but the people did not belong to their gods.

This is fact, and it became living truth through Jesus Christ, who said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16). He first loved us and set His love upon us before we ever loved Him. We then belong to Him when He calls us and when we believe. As Christ said:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:27–29)

The heathen keep their idols, but God keeps His people. Isaiah talks about the heathen carrying their idols and quotes the Lord as saying, "*Even to gray hairs I will carry you*" (Isaiah 46:4). An electrifying truth exists behind all this lovely sentiment.

First, when we believe, we make living contact with a vital area of God. We have contact with the common, but wonderful, areas in the heart of God—forgiveness, restoration, and salvation. But as individuals, we each also have our own unique contact with the divine. Each one who believes knows God in a way that nobody else does. God is infinite, and the aspects of His nature are endless. We cannot know Him throughout His unfathomable depths. And every person is

different. We all came from God and are shaped and molded as He wants us to be, especially by the new birth, in which we are “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29). God has a bit of Himself reserved especially for each one of us to know. We are connected with a little bit of His nature that corresponds with our nature. In the ocean of God, we each have a private mooring place that is for us alone and nobody else.

This is why it is hard for people to describe to others what God is like to them. God’s greatness cannot be displayed through one life. It needs all our lives. We must all believe. Unless we all activate our faith, as we all can, God’s goodness is known in only a limited fashion. Through the church—all of us together—the manifold riches of God are known to His praise and glory. God does not want one believer. He needs the millions in order for His greatness to flow out. The goodness of God is a great jewel with a million facets, each flashing and burning. Every believer is equal, each touching some part of God’s mind and heart for which God chose each one, and all together we display the wonders of His grace.

Second, by faith we discover our destiny in God. Not only does God express Himself by means of each of us, but we also only come fully alive as we touch Him by faith. God has hidden something of Himself especially for me when I believe. I was made by Him and for Him, not in some wide and general sense but in an intimate and personal way.

God is my God. He was the God of Abraham, who was close to Him in a different sense than Isaac was, and Isaac was close to Him in a way that Jacob was not. We could go through Scripture and see how people discovered God for themselves, or rather, how God revealed this or that side of His character to this one and that one. God was their God in a very personal sense.

A special part of each one of us can only be satisfied when we come to God. The source of what we are made for is in Him. He reaches the depths and fundamentals of every heart, and we will never be contented by any other means. We cannot substitute God. He designed us to respond to Him and made us to be who we are—having a need—and that need was meant to be met only in God. He is, “My God,” for each one of us. Each person has a different nature with different thoughts, but *Yahweh* is Lord for each one’s personality.

No Monotony in God

God is always who He is, but He is not a dead mountain or a monolith. He is a living fountain of water. He always contains freshness, a mystery for endless

discovery and delight. We find no monotony in God; whoever sees Him has a new view. Each of us discovers that who we are ourselves finds an echo in Him, because we come from Him, and we belong to Him as a child to its father. We cry, "*Abba Father*" (Romans 8:15). We see that in our new born-again nature, which does not come from earthly parentage but is of God. We find our home in Him, and our instinct responds to who He is. It is not a case of He loved us, but He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*. I am that important *one* of John 3:16. "*I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it*" (Revelation 2:17).

Faith in My God

A new area of the activity of God begins when anyone first believes, because each one believes God in his own way. When we do not believe, a link is missing in God's chain. We are not aliens being given a visa to enter the kingdom, and we are not gate crashing. Instead, Jesus said, "*The kingdom [was] prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matthew 25:34). The Lord is not just a God, or the God, or even Abraham's God. He is *my* God. He presents Himself personally to each of us as individual personalities. When we come to God believing, it is like coming home. We are not forcing our way in strange territory. Everything has been waiting just for us, ready for that moment when we begin to believe.

The Bible is not another history book of national events. It describes God's dealings with individuals like David, Daniel, Nathaniel, Lazarus, Nicodemus, and Simon Peter. "*Simon...do you love Me?*" (John 21:15). We have no common relationship with Christ. Instead, each man and each woman has a special relationship with Christ that nobody else can enter into. It is a faith relationship, and each one believes God his way, according to God's plan. We see God our own way and believe in Him that way. Thus, we should not try to be a Paul or Wesley or Wigglesworth. He asks us simply to believe, trust, and step out as He leads. The problems are all His. The going is ours.

FAITH AND GOD'S PRESENCE

At the beginning of the book of Revelation, Jesus described Himself in this way:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

The words *"who is to come"* have often been taken to mean Christ's second coming. It is true that they do include that blessed hope. Jesus is coming back, praise God, and we are *"to wait for His Son from heaven"* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). That is His great day of coming, because *"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). We missed His first visit, but we will not miss His second visit. We find it easy to believe He came before, as Scripture predicted. Now we believe the Scripture that says He will come again. The whole Christian church has always believed that. It is in the creeds, hymns, stained glass windows, and lectionary readings. Now, let us believe for now:

Moment by moment I am kept in His love
 Moment by moment I have life from above,
 Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
 Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.¹¹

The Prevailing Winds

The weathermen speak of the prevailing wind. The winds change, but they have a normal or general direction, such as from the west. The air currents naturally flow in that direction. In the spirit, we can also experience a prevailing wind from heaven. The Holy Spirit constantly comes with the pure freshness of glory, day and night, always streaming to us. We all talk about God moving on our

behalf in answer to prayer. And He does. But He also moves toward us all the time with prevailing currents of blessing and power.

God does not come in gusts or an occasional sudden blast. His sovereign will is nothing like that. His will is as Scripture teaches; God is not a weak force one day and a strong force another day. We need no barometer for God and no temperature gauge. He is not present for revival or healing just some of the time but all of the time; whether we experience the blowing of His wind from heaven is up to us, not God, who never changes. He does not have moods.

The poet said, “The Spirit bloweth and is still. In mystery our soul abides.”¹² That is not true, but we temperamental people may experience it that way. The Pentecostal revival changed the old thinking of a God of revival spasms. Now we know He is the God of constant revival. He does not enter the field, because He never leaves it.

This was the new Reformation, a doctrinal revelation that changed the face of the church, like Luther’s justification by faith. This is the Holy Spirit by faith. The Spirit has come to abide and is not coming and going mysteriously. Jesus spoke of a constant wind—the Spirit *blows*, not here today and gone tomorrow. God has no uncertainty factor, but our faith might. The wind blew into the upper room on the day of Pentecost and did not stop. All who set their sails of faith do not need to whistle for the wind, like men in the doldrums, because God has no doldrums.

The Parousia

Speaking of His coming, both His constant coming and His second coming, we see His coming is given a special name in the New Testament—*parousia*. It is called “the coming of Christ” in our English Bibles in 1 Corinthians 15:23 and Matthew 24:3. But actually, the biblical Greek word *parousia* means “presence.” He will become present. The presence of God will fill the whole earth at His coming. That will be a notable thing—not a flash that is quickly over and done with. Rather, the entire earth will become like the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Nobody will escape or forget or ignore Him then.

Presence is not used in the Old Testament Hebrew. Instead, it uses words like *face* as metaphors for God’s presence: “*Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance [face] upon us*” (Psalm 4:6). In these passages, God’s transcendence, or heavenly greatness, is in mind rather than His imminence, or closeness. He shined upon them from heaven. They did not think of His presence as Christians do today, though they believed He could be on their side, perhaps

by sending an angel.

But today, we have only a misty idea of *parousia*. God's presence is with us when He fulfills the promise to be where two or three are gathered together. (See Matthew 18:20.) The blessing and joy of such occasions, which to us seems more powerful sometimes than others, help us to believe for that great consummation of faith when His presence will fill earth and sky.

In the Old Testament, God told Moses he could not see His face, that is, the glory of His presence. Yet, Moses spoke to God, the Bible says, "*face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*" (Exodus 33:11). Whatever that was like was not the fullness of God's glory. In fact, when Moses said, "*Please, show me Your glory*" (Exodus 33:18), the Lord told him it was impossible for a person to live in that presence. However, God "*has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:6), though "*for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). One of the last great promises of God in the Bible is in Revelation 22:4, "*They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.*" That is the fulfillment of the promise of Christ, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8).

This is the great hope. It is not merely that we will live forever or that the earth will be our paradise. Who would want to live even in the Swiss Alps for a million years? Our expectation is to see the glorious, radiant face of our Lord Jesus Christ, which Moses could not see. We will see Him in His glory.

Radiation Area

Today, His presence is a radiation area—not contaminating, radioactive radiation, but resurrection-active radiation—and in His presence, life-building energy passes into us. And we are constantly in His presence, not just when we pray. He made that clear when He promised, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). It is not the full glory to come, but it is no ordinary presence, even now. Many times, I am conscious of Jesus Christ close to me as I speak for Him in our Great Gospel Crusades. It was as if I saw Him walk from the platform among the crowd to wherever people were reaching out for Him. He did and still does wonders of salvation, restoration, and healing.

When our faith rises, we have a sense of His presence that no human contact can ever surpass. A friend may be with us and even embrace us, but the presence of Christ is different. He pours Himself toward us and upon us, pervading our whole beings with an active, dynamic effect, whether we feel it or not.

God Never Visits

Jesus never used the language of visitation. He said, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, **I am** there in the midst of them.*” (Matthew 18:20). He did not say, “there I will be,” but, “**I am** there,” using the great I Am name of God, which indicates changeless permanence. We need not wait for Him. He is actively here, waiting for us. God never comes as a visitor. God never says, “Oh, I see a few believers; they’re praying. I’ll go and be with them.” He does not come to us; we come to Him.

We use the phrase, “a visitation of God,” as if He came as a hurricane or as if He had just been passing by and dropped in on us like a whirlwind for a day or so. I cannot find any Scripture to verify that. God never talks like that, and He does not promise it. Instead, Jesus said that when the Spirit comes He will *abide* with us, like the sun always shining, always at zenith. “*The Lord is there*” (Ezekiel 48:35)—*Yahweh Shammah*.

What are these experiences that we have when He seems to come to us? Perhaps it is not *seems* at all. The truth is, we isolate ourselves and protect ourselves from His coming. We put up a windshield, quench the Spirit, and block His access. We have desires that clash with His will. People talk about wrestling with God to know His will, but it is never necessary. They are really wrestling with themselves, hoping the will of God will turn out to be the same as their will. People wrestle with God for what they want, hoping He will approve.

Look again at this well-known verse in Revelation 3:20, “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*” The biblical Greek words literally mean, “I will enter to him.” In the Greek, the word *to* is special (Greek *pros*), suggesting “movement toward.” It can be translated as “with.” When we hear Christ at the door and we open our lives to Him, He comes with us.

In the famous first verse of John’s Gospel, it says, “*The Word was with God*” (John 1:1). This verse uses the same special preposition (*pros*), this time translated, “The word was *with* God.” That is, a constant movement of active fellowship exists in God, directed toward Him and moving into Him infinitely.

This is a picture of God as a glorious living Being—Father, Son, and Spirit. We name this fellowship the Trinity, but we never understand and will not understand until we see Him. It must mean something very beautiful and wonderful indeed. We can think of three glorious fountains of light forever cascading toward one another. Each one is lost in the other, a glorious and

everlasting triple fountain of life. To dwell in this presence is the final reward of faith. We believe for it and will at last have it.

That is what we are talking about when we say “God is with us.” The biblical idea is fellowship. Jesus prayed, “*That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us...that they may be one just as We are one*” (John 17:21–22). The biblical word is *fellowship*, oneness with Him. It is a mutual reaction, a loving oneness, like that of the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who is the bond in the Godhead comes to bond us to the Father and the Son.

In John 14:18, Jesus also says, “*I will come to you.*” It is the present tense, “I am coming to you”—in other words, it is happening all the time. Jesus also included the Father and Holy Spirit in this coming, saying: “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him*” (John 14:23). That present coming is happening all over the world, as the Holy Spirit is falling in the former and latter rain together ceaselessly. The true reward of faith is not to get money or material benefit from God but to be one with Him and see His glory.

Divine Precedents

What God tells us about Himself is a prophecy of what He will do. All God’s acts are precedents, or rehearsals, for regular performances. What He has shown us, by His own spontaneous initiative, is to encourage our faith to ask and believe.

Here is a biblical instance of this reality. The two miracle prophets, Elijah and Elisha, both raised mother’s sons from the dead. (See 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4.) These are the two outstanding healing miracles of the Old Testament. About 700 years later, Jesus went into the same area and did the same thing, raising a mother’s son from the dead in the entrance to Nain. (See Luke 7.)

Now, notice something very striking. Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus not only raised sons from the dead, but also gave the sons back to their mothers. It was a kind of hallmark or fingerprint. To raise a son and give him back to his mother, rather than the father, showed the same Lord was at work in the same way. “The Lord is doing business in the same old way.” Seven centuries made no difference, and twenty centuries make no difference either. He works wonders on earth because He is on familiar territory, doing what He did before.

How does faith relate to this? Faith does not stand alone as just faith forever. It gets things going, begins with things happening. It opens the door, sets the sails,

clears the decks, and makes the way for God. It is not a case of God one day waking up and starting to do things. He waits only for us to dare and do in His name by faith what He revealed of His goodness and promise in the past. As John 5:17 states, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.*”

What God was and did in the past spells out His will for the present and future. The testimony of the past is for our faith to grasp on to so we can act upon it and bring to bear God’s wonder-working power again upon the world. His past predicts the present—if we believe.

Perfect harmony and consistency exists in God from eternity to eternity. And it is this eternity that has swept down upon us earthlings and will carry us along in His everlasting joy.

11. Daniel W. Whittle, “Moment by Moment,” 1893.

12. Matthew Arnold, “Morality,” lines 3–4.

FAITH AND ACTION

Faith is like a wiring system to carry power into our lives. How we need it! The wiring carries power but does not create it. Faith is similar. It only carries power. Faith in itself is not power, but it links us to the power source. We will find no link with God's power without faith.

No Generators

The source of power is God in heaven. *"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen"* (Matthew 6:13). On the first recorded New Testament campaign, Philip the evangelist came up against Simon, who used sorcery, *"claiming that he was someone great,"* and *"to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'"* (Acts 8:9–10). Simon, astounded at the miracles Philip performed in the name of Jesus, professed salvation, was baptized, and went along with Philip.

Then Peter and John came to Samaria and laid hands on the converts, who then received the Holy Spirit with such a powerful demonstration that Simon could witness their experience. He coveted the ability to lay hands on people for the Spirit and offered the apostles money if they would give him the same power. But Peter rebuked Simon, because he (Simon) thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. From that time, *simony* has been the name for the purchase of church office.

But there is more to the story. Simon wanted power, whether by sorcery or money. His desire is pretty universal, and people resort to many means for it. The general aim of the New Age groups is to tap into sources of power—mind power, cosmic power, earth force, occult power—by a thousand theories and practices. Some Christian believers also seek the power of God by dubious processes.

Some Instances

Some think power is generated by religious exercises, such as prayer, fasting, or separation. The idea is that the longer they pray and fast or the more they avoid the things of the world, the more power they will earn. For example, they expect power to manifest in direct proportion to time spent in prayer; two hours brings twice as much power as one hour. It is a process of generating power by exertion; the greater the labor the greater the current—power in commercial proportion to hours spent. How much does God pay per hour? Power is thereby a credit to Christians; the display demonstrates the labor. According to this belief, the more power a person has, the more admirable the person is—on a cause and effect basis.

Yet the teaching of Jesus has nothing like that in it. He said we must not suppose we will be heard for our *many words*; we cannot calculate the effectiveness by how much we say or how long we talk to God. Of course, we are creatures of time, and we must spend time in prayer. On some occasions, it may be many hours before we feel satisfied. But prayer measured by the clock for the sake of praying a long time is a work of the flesh, not of faith. Without faith, a month of prayer is not as good as five minutes with faith. No amount of time can make up for lack of faith. It is a matter of faith, not time.

Some wait in silent meditation to draw strength. “Do nothing, not even think! Open your mind to whatever may come.” This is not praying but mysticism, waiting for any impression that floats into one’s awareness—a voice, a revelation, a vision—or absorbing spiritual vibrations. This openness carries no guarantees that what comes is from God.

It is not the Bible way. Revelation independent of Scripture is the way of the false prophet. People claim God has spoken to them in their minds, and He can, and does—but not at our beck and call. This claim of mystical and subjective guidance and knowledge has worked havoc all the way through history and was the worry of apostles all the way through the New Testament. It is the way in which Islam, Mormonism, Buddhism, and other religions came about. Thus we see that the claim to spiritual power has to be tested by the Word of God.

Power is often sought from holy places or objects. People visit shrines and look at the relics of saints or try some physical link with men of God. Yet these long dead people never believed their bones could cure people or planned that they should. The holiness of saints did not impregnate their clothes or other objects for people to benefit from, and their relics do not ooze grace or give the living “a

leg up the stairs” to heaven. “Pilgrimages of grace” are notably absent from the New Testament. The Christians of old never believed any such powers could be transmitted from them. After all, it would only be second-hand power, a kind of cast-off from the dead. Why not receive first hand? If we do what the apostles did, we will get what the apostles got. As Peter said, God gave to the household of Cornelius the same gift the apostles received on the day of Pentecost: *“God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 11:17). *“The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”* (Acts 2:39).

Blessing does not brush off on us from physical contact. The Holy Spirit does not infect us, and we do not receive it by contagion. He comes to us Himself and dwells in us. The Spirit comes when we seek Him directly from God, by faith in the name of Jesus.

The mystic realm is not where disciples find power, because power is available on earth. The Spirit of God has made our bodies His temples, and He does not float around in some super-conscious area of our personalities. Instead, He is real; He is not our own inner consciousness or the sub-conscious or the super-conscious.

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above)But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach). (Romans 10:6, 8)

Christ’s atoning death and triumphant resurrection made available to us all the divine power and aid we could ever need. For two thousand years, Jesus has proven to be all He said He was, and He has done all He said He would do. If we come to Him and ask—instead of sitting hopefully in some ancient stone building, trying to absorb the vibes, or seeking association with a third party, living or dead—He will fulfill His promise and endue us with power.

In fact, Scripture does not encourage placid religious inactivity of that kind at all. God sends us out to do His work, and as we go, He gives power, strength, and everything we need to us.

Power also comes with truth. We cannot have power without the Word. If our cups are to overflow, we first need a cup, and the Word is that vessel. In this way, God’s power is not a loose or dispersed energy we collect by soaking in quietism and deep meditation.

The mystics talk about the “cloud of unknowing” and the “dark night of the

soul,” but Jesus said we should know and not walk in darkness. Ordinary people on this plane of mortal existence know Jesus. Their simple faith touches Christ, not some mysterious level of airy spirituality. If we go to Him, He meets us on our human level as flesh and blood creatures, not as mere spirits. And He does not cast us out.

Take Peter, for example. Peter had a revelation—which is a form of power. It was more than a spiritual illumination about nothing in particular. It was about Jesus. And he did not sit like Buddha to find it out. In the midst of their daily activity, Peter perceived who Jesus was. Jesus said, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 16:17). The Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us. They are positive: the assurance of salvation; the sense of Christ’s presence; the whisper of the Holy Spirit in our deepest hearts; the gifts of the word of knowledge, wisdom, and prophecy. These are the defined responses of God to our faith.

God does not play a game of hide and seek. Christ said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life*” (John 3:36). He is not the Great Unknown but the God who sent Jesus and wants us to know Him. We need His strength, His enabling, and His energizing, and for this He reveals Himself. Jesus is not a strange voice echoing from the beyond. If we call upon Him, He answers us and does things. He saves, guides, and heals. We throw ourselves upon His promises, and His arms are already there, open to welcome us.

The pride of humanity desires to possess powers independent of Christ and to be as gods. For instance, Earth-power seekers believe they are part of the god Gaia, the planet Earth, and profess to absorb the earth energies. The basic sin of humankind is to stand alongside God with our own light and power, our own glory, and feel we are self-sufficient.

God, Himself, is the source of power, and He is found only by faith in Christ. Jesus is both our guide and the way: “*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5). For that office, He paid the infinite price. He knows the way because He walked it. Christ explored every inch of it from heaven to earth and from earth down to hell. We cannot ignore Him. Making our own path to the well of the water of life is neither necessary nor successful. The all-sufficient Christ opens it to us and says “*only believe*” (Mark 5:36).

The book of Hebrews uses a wonderful picture, speaking of Christ’s body or

flesh, which was ripped with whips and nails, and comparing it to the veil torn open:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh. (Hebrews 10:19–20)

This alludes to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The *Holiest* (or the Holy of Holies), where they said God dwelt, lay behind an embroidered curtain thirty feet long and several inches thick. At the moment when Christ died, an unseen hand tore that curtain from the top to the bottom (see Matthew 27:51), leaving the Holy of Holies wide open. Anyone could look in and see where the immediate glory of God had once hovered.

That is the wonderful Christian truth. “No more veil. God bids me enter by the new and living way.”¹³ The door to God is no longer closed. We no longer have to strive, searching the dimensions of heaven, waiting and hoping. Jesus said, “*Knock, and it will be opened to you*” (Matthew 7:7). Ring the bell of God’s gate, and the front door is immediately opened. God says, “Welcome!” He is not hard of hearing or hard to be found. He has made His name and His address known.

O the welcome I have found there,
God in all His love made known!
O the glories that surround there
Those accepted in His Son!

The world has striven to create its own spirituality and to gather strength from its own sources. But any higher life quality can only be found at the source, with the God who made us. As Christ said, “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10), and as John said, “*In Him was life*” (John 1:4).

God has set up His own way. The purpose of Christ was to make war against the devil and destroy the evils that cut us off from the life forces of God. This mighty work He accomplished at the cross, with His final cry, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). The Greek word *tetelestai* does not mean “ended”; it means “completed or perfected.” The edifice was ready, so by His death Jesus placed the last cornerstone.

He descended into death to confront death and defeat it. Then, victorious, He rose from that experience and ascended, for us, to the right hand of power. The

disciples saw Him alive, as evidence of His victorious battle on the cross, and within days of His ascension, the blessings of heaven poured upon men and women, transforming them. Faith in the victorious Christ changed the disciples from cringing and hunted creatures to bold proclaimers of the gospel, dauntless warriors of the truth.

Their faith rested in the promise of Christ. They obediently waited for the empowerment, though they had no idea what it was or how it would come. Still they sat with open hearts in obedient faith, certain Christ would not let them down. That faith became power-lines to carry the surge of divine glory into their souls. The day of Pentecost was the switch-on day of the power stations of Christ's work on earth.

Spiritually, just as in the natural, there are good conductors and also insulators. For electricity, the normal wiring is copper. The conductivity of lead is almost dead. Its resistance factor is 19, compared with only 1.72 for copper. The Bible compares faith to gold, "*the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes*" (1 Peter 1:7). Gold is a good conductor, and this is a parable. Golden faith is the conductor of spiritual life, providing instant contact. Unbelief is like lead—gray, lifeless, and heavy. Nothing comes through from heaven. Unbelief blesses nobody and conducts no advantage or benefit; it does no good.

Acts 10 exemplifies for us the conductivity of faith. A centurion in the Roman occupying forces named Cornelius was a God-fearer—that is, a foreigner who went along with the Jewish religion; he was as much of a convert to Judaism as Gentiles were allowed to be and had many virtues, including giving liberally to charity, praying, fearing God, and being righteous, devout, a fine influence, and respected by all.

In the list of his attributes, one thing is conspicuously absent—faith. Like his Rabbi teachers, he thought salvation was an achievement, that a life of prayers and charity would add up to divine favor at last. Religion was a mere liturgy.

Then a messenger from heaven entered his house. The bold soldier was terrified, but the angel said, "*Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God*" (Acts 10:4). God knew, and it had all been entered to his credit in the divine audit.

However, Cornelius needed far more, and God had far more for him. The messenger simply said, "*Send for Simon whose surname is Peter*" (Acts 10:5), because Peter had the keys of the kingdom of God.

Peter came and used the keys—that is, preached the good news of Christ to all whom Cornelius had gathered. For Peter, this episode contained a series of revelations, too. He said, *“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”* (Acts 10:34–35). But accepted for what? Divine appreciation only? This is the real question.

Cornelius told Peter they had all come *“to hear all the things commanded you by God”* (Acts 10:33). What Peter said was just that—the words God wanted Cornelius to hear. He gave Cornelius and the people with him an account of Christ’s work, ministry, death, and resurrection, which is still the church’s message to the nations. Peter had put the key in the lock, and then he turned it by saying, *“All the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43).

Until that point, Peter’s audience had received every word, but as soon as he mentioned *believing*, the door of the kingdom opened. *“The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word....[and those who came with Peter] heard them speak with tongues and magnify God”* (Acts 10:44, 46). Cornelius had found the vital thing. It is not what we give to God but what He gives to us. The faith contact had been made, the circuit was completed, and the power of the Spirit flowed through immediately.

Referring to those who tried other ways, Jesus said, *“You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”* (John 5:40). On that particular occasion, He was talking to religious men who thought their studies, pouring over the Scriptures, would bring them the reward of eternal life. They hoped to work their passage into the kingdom by handling the Scriptures. In their hands, they daily held over six thousand promises of God, yet they were no better off for any of them.

It is an old and familiar story. Some people set up their own little generators and do not switch on the work of Christ. Meanwhile, the mighty turbines of heaven could meet every need of power in their lives. By looking at a few “good works” named in Scripture, we can learn in depth the secrets of belief and action:

- **Prayer:** *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord”* (James 1:6–7). Jesus said, *“Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you*

receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24).

- **Hearing the word of God:** *“The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:2).*
- **Seeking God:** *“He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).*
- **Worship:** Worship in Scripture is not merely something done in church once a week. The word itself means to serve God. To worship God in a place of worship is part of that service, but all service must be an act of faith, for *“without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6).*
- **Keeping the commandments:** *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29).*
- **Tithing:** Jesus described two men—one a tax gatherer, knowing he was sinful, praying for mercy; the other a religious Pharisee who claimed God’s attention because he gave tithes. The Pharisee prayed about himself, *“I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:12).* Jesus judged the situation. *“I tell you that this man [the tax collector], went down to his house justified rather than the other [the Pharisee]” (verse 14).* We can give tithes in unbelief, as did the Pharisees.

Positive and Negative

Hebrews 6:1 and 9:14 speak of *dead works*—that is, good works that do not proceed from faith. The great ceremonies of the temple in Jerusalem were dead works because they had become routines that had little to do with any kind of belief. They were negative as far as any divine power was concerned.

A preacher, talking about dead works, tells of a woman who always cut the end

off a joint of meat when she put it in the oven because she had seen her mother do this. Her mother came one day and asked her daughter why she always did this. She said, “Mother you always did.”

“Yes,” she said, “I did. But that was only because my pan was too small to take the whole joint.” This was a dead work, a ritual performed without even knowing the reason.

However, James 2:26 gives the other side—“*Faith without works is dead.*” It is no good saying, “I believe the Lord is with me,” if you never go anywhere. If you never place yourself in a position where you must depend on God, your faith is meaningless. Your belief may be very positive, but it is a dead positive if you do not act on it. Deeds come alive with faith, and faith comes alive with deeds.

Believing goes on in the heart and mind, unseen, until it actuates something we do. The power of God operates when we operate by faith. The famous chapter of Hebrews 11 was written to show that, because the ancients of faith believed, they dared. And many more examples of this exist in Scripture.

In closing, let us meditate on this reality in Hebrews 12:1–2:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

APPENDIX

FAITH VERSUS DOUBT

Unbelief and Atheism

Unbelief and atheism never produced an atom of good in the world, but have filled history with misery and horror. They bring no cheer, damage the human psyche, destroy hope, and lead multitudes to excesses, such as drugs and alcohol, for comfort and forgetfulness. The inspiration of wonder, mystery, and beauty turns sour with cynicism. Their effectiveness in building a better world and in bettering the miseries of the deprived have proved negligible compared to the work of Christians.

Cynics and atheists claim the West rests on Christian principles, not on Greek ideals. But an attack against the basic Christian conceptions militates against national stability. It is a betrayal. Such people will fall into the pit they have dug. Godlessness filters down from the intelligentsia to the less adequate and is interpreted in excess and crime. But the sanctions of faith in God are the shield and buckler of society.

What Jesus Christ said and did never prompted one deed of wickedness ever perpetrated. Evil men have denied Him, and in His name they worked horrors, for which Christ will judge them on the Day of Judgment.

If there is no God, why work for the future when it will all end in nothing forever? As English philosopher Bertrand Russell admitted, after ninety years, the atheist can only build on a foundation of despair. Yet faith in God has been the highest inspiration, beyond that of love and romance, for every kind of great work known on earth.

That Christ, the Son of God, did not resist the murderous men at the cross and

then rose from the dead is a teaching so incredible that nobody would preach it at all unless it was true. It would never have risen in the first place as a religious faith unless it had all happened. In the ordinary way, such teaching would never have been considered viable—worthy of a chance in a mocking world. Nobody could have invented it or believed it—the story of a Jew presented by Jews, the most despised of people. The only reason it has conquered the world is because it is true.

Consider the virgin birth. Why would anybody teach such a wildly unlikely story unless it was true? The Gospels circulated and thousands believed years before Mary, the mother of Christ, died. They obviously knew it was true; otherwise, it could not have been written or accepted in a book read by people who knew Mary.

Some think people in biblical days would believe anything because they were so ignorant. They could believe in the virgin birth, for example, because they did not know what we know. In fact, that is nonsense. They had as much reason to doubt it as we have, and some did. They knew just as well as you and I that virgin girls cannot produce babies—science or no science. But if God decides to become man, what is to stop Him from ordering it that way? Is He God or not? Unbelief is not modern. We only have modern excuses.

The same applies to miracles. Nobody can say miracles cannot happen. Nobody knows enough to say that. We cannot be that clever. Such a statement calls for total understanding not only of nature and of divine things but also of all mysteries and all history. A Scottish philosopher once said he did not believe miracles happen because they do not! Where is the logic in that? How could he know such a sweeping fact? Did he know every remote corner and person on earth and everything that had ever happened? That is what he would need to know in order to judge what is a miracle and what is not. The science of one hundred years ago said miracles were impossible. But they also said much else was impossible, and they were wrong. In their minds, television was impossible. In a broadcast in October 1996, Alistar Cooke pointed out that Einstein himself said nuclear fission could never be a source of power! Yet now we pluck voices, music, and pictures out of the air from across the oceans or a billion miles out in space. Is this utterly fantastic and ridiculous? They did not know enough to say so. Skepticism is the conceit of the know-all.

Science has not disproved God or the Bible, and scientists as a group are more likely to be believers than any other professional workers. The people who say they cannot believe because of science usually know nothing about science!

They are still in the nineteenth century and have inherited the opinions of early attempts at understanding the world, settling for opinions now long outdated as if they were infallible. Having a closed mind about the power of God is like having a closed parachute—you jump to a hasty conclusion.

The old anti-God museums of the Stalinist era in Russia seemed so convincing to atheists. But they made Christians laugh because they were so naïve. At Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London, an atheist challenged God. He said, “I challenge God to strike me dead in one minute from now.”

He held his watch for sixty seconds. “There you are! There is no God.”

An elderly lady piped up. “Excuse me, are you married? Have you a family? Have you a son?”

“Yes,” he answered to all three questions.

“If your son challenged you to fight and kill him, would you do so?”

“No,” he said. He would not.

“Then do you think God would want to kill you?”

The way to know God exists is to trust Him. The way to know electricity exists is not by theory but by using it. Simply begin believing God; act on belief, and doubts will disappear. Live as if there is a God, and you will know there is. Faith in God is our own natural ability made operative by the Holy Spirit. To use faith is to be led by the Holy Spirit. God is not my faith in God, but He comes to me when I am prepared to trust Him. A baby gets strength to walk by walking. We get faith by believing. It is not something we have but what we *do*.

The principle is explained in a paradox of Jesus: “*Whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him*” (Luke 8:18). If you come in a sullen mood, hoping faith will not work to show the world it will not, well, it will not work. God will oblige you by not doing anything, if that is your secret wish. You will get your miserable and mean reward. If you feel sorry for yourself and say God is not fair to you and does not do anything for you, that is how it will be. What you have, you will lose. The last glimmer flickers out.

We Are What We Believe

Anton Chekhov said, “Man is what he believes.” So, if people say they believe in nothing, it means they are nothing! If we believe in nothing, we live for nothing and get nowhere. But everybody believes something. A man is what he believes, and our believing is shown by what we do.

If Chekhov is right—and he is—then we are something if we believe in something. Believing in sport makes us sport fans, for what that is worth. Believing in money may make us very much something in the present world system but nothing to God. Believing in Christ makes us the greatest thing we can ever be—sons and daughters of the living God, begotten of Him. By faith we bring ourselves under the estimation of God, who sees us as the purchases of the blood of Christ. We cost Him dearly, and we are dear to Him.

Psychology of a Believer

That, in fact, is the Christian's psychological outlook. A believer feels he is somebody. He is humble but does not crawl, because he has an eternal destiny. No believer thinks of himself as a breath, a vapor that vanishes at sun-up, as the writers of the Psalms suggested. They wrote before Christ came. Then He *"brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:10). Nothing could give our confidence a greater boost than believing and knowing who we are in Christ—chosen, called, invested with His Spirit, and sharing the labors of the blessed Spirit Himself.

At the same time, nothing could keep us more humble than knowing our sins deserved eternal death, but Jesus died for us. We who were unworthy were chosen. Money, brains, and breeding can give us an ego, but the believer knows he is a personality. He is great but has no cause to boast. God has *"exalted the lowly"* (Luke 1:52), as Mary sang at the birth of her Son, Jesus.

True personality arises only in Christ. By accident of birth, we may be rich, intelligent, assertive, and successful, or we may be poor, simple, inferior, and unknown. That is a temporary state. We can lose it. Rudyard Kipling is the name half the world knows as that of a matchless writer, but in old age, he had to ask what his own name was. What we are by nature is not what counts. What we are in Christ is the truth about us. Believing means each of us, however lowly in station, is given the main chance.

Some of the greatest people of God, who brought benefits to an unworthy world, were nothing in this world. Billy Bray, a Cornish laborer who was simple to the point of eccentricity, is famous around the world a hundred years after his death and is regarded as one of the aristocrats of the kingdom of God.

The gospel revival in Latin America is finding men in the squalor, at the bottom of their social order, and lifting them to influence and high citizenship. Muddled by alcoholism and ignorance, beset by marriage complications, a man comes and sees some old drinking pal now transformed and ministering to a congregation of

thousands. Suddenly, he recognizes his worth as one who has been redeemed and purchased by the blood of Christ. And as a result, he believes, is converted, and stands up to be counted.

Millions of such characters cast off their groveling existence as nobodies and become something in themselves, personalities of character and value. Onesimus was a runaway Greek slave, destined for punishment by death and trying to lose his identity in Rome. Then Paul—or rather, God—found him. He was elevated, *“no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother”* (Philemon 16). We are what we believe. As James 2:5 says, *“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?”*

Being What We Believe

What we are depends on who we think God is. Christians know God is like Jesus Christ. It affects us when we believe in Him, and it makes us like Him—subject, of course, to the limits of human weakness and inconsistency. Something in us strives to reach that standard. But whatever our moral attainment, we know we stand in high regard before the only one who matters, our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Believing in Christ brings out the highest and best in us and pushes self into the background. Believe in anything else—money, sport, knowledge, humanism—and somehow self always arrives in the foreground. Believing even in a religion can be entirely for the benefit of our own souls, as with the holy men of the east. But when we see God as Christ showed Him to us, self-concern begins to die. Our number one interest will no longer be number one.

Wisdom, all the qualities that make for the good life, is described between the covers of that one book, the Bible. Yet the keynote is, *“Trust in the Lord”* (Psalm 4:5). A New Testament writer drew up a list of the most honored people in the Bible, those bringing permanent benefits to the world, and of them he said, *“For by it [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony”* (Hebrews 11:2). The secret of their lives was always the same—faith.

Others did great things too, but purely as a credit to themselves. God honored those whose efforts sprang from faith in Him. Each of them would never have done what they did unless they had depended on God. They rose above themselves, and what they were was what faith in God made them. It was not what they would naturally do or even could naturally do. The greatest miracles of faith are not scientific impossibilities but personal impossibilities.

It was not great faith that lifted them above their average. They were ordinary, everyday people with ordinary faith—faith that struggled with nail-biting doubt and sweating fears but that still put them into action. They were not saints sitting on cloud nine, spending their time in contemplation, but practical people who changed life around them.

What Talents Are

If we want to transact business with God, faith is the coinage. Everyone has a supply of that currency. In the Talents Parable (see Matthew 25:14–30), which is about investing faith, Jesus describes servants with talents—one with five, one with two, and another with one. The master went away, and on his return, he found the five-talent man and the two-talent man had both doubled their capital. But the other man had only kept and buried his talent, doing nothing with it. The master gave the first two servants a multiplied reward, but he took the talent from the third man and gave it to the ten-talent man.

The focus of the parable is the man who buried his talent. Jesus was not talking about the ability to play the piano or do excellent needlework, but about faith and the man who lost his faith. He *kept the faith*, and that is all he did. In the end, he lost it altogether. Faith invested gains interest and increases. People with big faith did not wake up one morning and find it in their stocking like a gift from Father Christmas. They used what they had, and it gathered strength and weight. That is always the principle. Moses' first miracle was only to turn his rod into a snake. He took many steps of faith before he led a whole nation into the wilderness, trusting God to feed them.

Look at the disciples. In Matthew 8:26, Jesus said to them, “*Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?*” This verse uses a word that is hard to translate into English. Essentially, Jesus called them a name—little-faiths. Then after the resurrection, we read in Mark 16:14, “*Later he appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and he rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen him after he had risen.*”

As Big as Our Faith

Incredibly, those little-faith men later changed the world. Seeing Jesus alive left them stubbornly unbelieving, but eventually they had a faith breakthrough. Earlier, they had asked Jesus to help them with their faith:

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up

by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” (Luke 17:5–6)

It seems Jesus was correcting their ideas about faith. A mustard seed is a mere dot, which means Jesus was saying that if we have faith at all—if the dot is there—that is enough!

A friend objected to the bank personalizing his checks by having his name printed on them, but the computer system had to print something in the name space. Eventually, they settled on using a dot only. Checks pass on the strength of that dot. It is distinctive.

If we have faith at all, it distinguishes us, even if it is only a dot. Size does not matter. What increases is not the strength or scale of our faith but its scope. Faith is measured by what it covers. If you have a good electric flashlight, you can narrow its beam and focus it on perhaps just the keyhole of a door, but you can also enlarge it to throw light across the whole doorway. Faith at first has a small and limited range, but as confidence comes, it covers a larger area and believes for more and bigger things.

People may have faith for a healing, perhaps when they are sick, but do they have faith in God for every part of their lives? Have they faith in God when they are not healed? Perhaps the triumph of faith for some individuals would not be to deliver people from wheelchairs but to be delivered themselves from egotism or bad temper.

The apostle Paul was a man of envious trust in God. He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, and laid hands on people to be filled with the Spirit. He preached in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. We read all that, but most of what he says is about the effects of faith in himself—what faith had done for his soul.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul *boasts* about his experiences and his apostleship. He talks about how “*the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds*” (2 Corinthians 12:12), but only because the Corinthians put such value on them. The real signs of his apostleship were what God had enabled him to be: “*I am what I am, and His grace toward me*” (1 Corinthians 15:10). He had gone to God for healing, and it was refused, but by faith he lived unhealed and displayed the character of Christ in all his career—by faith. He said, “*The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

Little Faith but a Big God

It is not the size of your faith but the size of the God you believe in that determines the size of the results. Too many people have too small of a God. They have a gentle Jesus, a meek and mild God, or a harmless, old granddad God, or a pleasant morning English church God who slips out at sunrise to watch a cricket on the village green. Some even have a false god. The Nazis in Germany resurrected the northern gods and wrecked Europe.

It would be tedious even to list the false gods and the horrors their followers have committed to please them. Christians were roasted alive on gridirons to please the Roman deities. Distorted ideas of Jesus Christ Himself, who is the essence of all love, have inspired many a murder—the Crusades, the Inquisition, and pogroms against the Jews. What these wicked people believed is not remotely connected to the New Testament or the Christ of Calvary. They blasphemed Christ's cross, using it as a symbol of purposes that were violently opposite to what it meant.

By contrast, millions know faith in Christ has revolutionized them and set them about the business of telling everybody about Him and trying to make this world a better place. We all believe, and belief is a potent force. The God of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for us all and retook it, rising from the grave.

Eight Proven Facts

- Anybody with faith in the Jesus of the Gospels can never commit atrocities, even against enemies.
- Anybody who loves the Christ of the Bible is not a nobody, though the world recognizes only the worldly.
- Faith in Jesus is the one pure power to make the least person great and reduce emperors to nobodies.
- Faith is not just a nice thing, like a box of gourmet chocolate candy. It is the power element of all life and the greatest force for social good known to humankind.
- The most dangerous thing for anybody or any nation is to believe in the wrong thing.

- A door of service fit for a king opens to every Christian believer.
- Ordinary faith is the means by which ordinary people become extraordinary.
- Great faith is only great things done by simple faith. I believe in believing. I believe in believing God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reinhard Bonnke is principally known for his Great Gospel Crusades throughout the continent of Africa. The son of a German pastor, Reinhard gave his life to the Lord at age nine and heard the call to the African mission field before he was even a teenager. It was there, in the small mountain country of Lesotho, that God placed upon his heart a vision of “the continent of Africa being washed in the precious blood of Jesus.” Since the start of the new millennium, Bonnke’s ministry has recorded seventy-four million documented decisions for Jesus Christ. He has authored numerous books and has spent several years developing the Full Flame Film Series, eight inspirational films aimed at inspiring and challenging the church to Holy Spirit evangelism. He is husband to Anni, father to Kai-Uwe, Gabrielle, and Susie, and grandfather to eight grandchildren. He and his wife now reside in Orlando, Florida.