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PART 1

The Preparation For a Ministry

CHAPTER 1 Listening to God's Voice

Large doors swing on small hinges. God tests us in many areas many times, before He commits any important ministry to us. He tests us to see if we are faithful in the *little* things before He commits *greater* things to us. As with Adam and Eve, God asks for obedience to His voice first of all.

One of my earliest memories of obeying the voice of the Lord was when I was 15 years old, soon after I had joined the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla (Pune) for training to be a Naval officer. The year was 1955 and I was on vacation (from the Academy), with my parents who lived in New Delhi. One Sunday evening, my younger brother and I had gone to attend a church service. After the service, at about 8 pm, both of us were waiting at the bus stand to catch the bus to return home. Suddenly a thought began to grow in my mind that I should witness to someone about Christ. I had heard the good news of the gospel again that evening and felt I must share it with someone, before going to bed that night. But I was not sure whether this was a prompting from the Lord or just my own thought. In any case it was getting late - and I needed to get back home soon.

In the distance, I saw the lights of a bus coming towards us. I told the Lord silently, “If that is NOT the bus to my home, then I will take it as a sign from You that I should witness to someone before going home. If it IS the bus for my home, then I will take the bus and go home.” The bus drew near and I saw that it was NOT the bus I had to take. The sign I had asked for was fulfilled. So I told my younger brother that I had to go somewhere else before coming home and asked him to go home alone. I then walked to a nearby park hoping that I would meet someone there whom it would be easy to witness to – because this was the first time I was venturing out to witness for the Lord in a public place, alone.

I saw an old man sitting on a bench in the park and went and sat next to him. I made casual conversation with him for a few minutes in Hindi and soon became bold enough to talk to him about eternal things. I told him about the love of God for man and how Christ died for our sins and the simple gospel message that I knew. He listened to me patiently. Since it was God Who had put an urge within me to witness that night, I assume that He must have had this man in mind to reach with the gospel. I hope I shall meet this man in heaven one day. That was my first venture at witnessing openly and all by myself in a public place. God tested me to see if I would obey the inner promptings of His Spirit.

That was “*the day of small beginnings*” (*Zech.4:10*). Since then God has given me the opportunity to preach His Word to crowds of many thousands of people in many parts of the world. But it all began with a small act of obedience one Sunday evening in New Delhi.

Be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. You will never know until you stand before the Lord how much you missed whenever you did NOT obey that voice.



*As a Cadet in the National Defence Academy
September 1955*

CHAPTER 2

Assurance of Salvation

Some believers can remember very clearly the exact date and time when they were born again. But I cannot. In fact I don't even know in which year I was born again. That does not mean that being born again is a gradual process. It is not. Passing from death to life in Christ takes place in an instant. But many people like me who were born and brought up in God-fearing Christian homes, cannot pinpoint the exact moment when that miracle took place. That is because many who are like me, ask the Lord to come into their heart, many, many times and we can't say which of those times was the real one.

If I remember rightly, I asked the Lord to come into my heart for the first time, when I was about 13. But I did not know whether He had come in or not, because I did not feel or experience anything, when I prayed. So I kept on asking the Lord to come into my heart again and again – perhaps over a hundred times during the next few years – but each time I felt nothing! And so I did not know whether I was saved or not.

As long as I was at home, the restraints imposed on me by my parents kept me from many worldly forms of entertainment like the cinema etc., But once I joined the military academy and the Indian Navy, I was on my own and such restraints were gone. Gradually I became a worldly Christian who went to church only as a matter of habit – and not out of any conviction.

But one good thing came out of my trying out the world's entertainments. I discovered that everything the world had to offer was empty and hollow – incapable of satisfying me in a lasting way. One day, in July 1959, as I was sitting in my room in the Naval Base at Cochin and thinking about all this and reading the Bible, I came to John 6:37, where Jesus said, "I will certainly not cast out anyone who comes to me". I had read that verse many times before. But that day it struck me forcefully - and I believed it. I knew that I had come to the Lord many times. I suddenly realized that if I had done my part, Jesus must have done His part – He must have received me. It was then that I realized that *unbelief was the greatest sin* (See John 16:9). For if I did not believe God's word, I was then making Him out to be a liar - and that was the greatest insult anyone could give to God. So, after 6 years of being tossed about, I believed - and I was sure that I was saved. What did I learn from my experience? Two things.

First of all, that *when you are not sure of your salvation, it is very easy to get discouraged and to backslide.*

Secondly, that *faith is a gift of God.* I was 19 years old when I first got assurance of my salvation. More than 46 years have passed since that day, but I have never once doubted my salvation. I have doubted many other things in these years, but I have never doubted my salvation. I dropped an anchor that day on the ground of God's infallible Word and my ship has never drifted since then. I have been battered by many fierce storms in these years, and my ship has swung wildly at times, but *my anchor has held.* How can I explain that? I can only say that *God gave me the grace to "believe" His Word that day.* Even faith is a gift of God. So we cannot glory even in our faith. All we can do is humbly glorify God.



*With my parents, when I passed out of the
National Defence Academy (Dec.1957)
as First among the Naval Cadets*

CHAPTER 3

A Help In Time Of Need

In July 1959, I was living in the Naval Base at Cochin. I had just been commissioned as a Naval Officer. I had also received the assurance of my salvation in the same month, and had decided to live totally for the Lord.

One evening, two of my fellow-Naval-officers came to me and told me that a good movie was going to be shown that evening in the Naval Base cinema theatre, and suggested that we all go together to see it. I had often gone with them to the movies previously. But now that I had been born again, I had decided that I would not go to such movies any more. The Lord had also taken away from my heart the desire to go to the cinema. But I did not have the courage to tell my friends that I was now a born-again Christian. So I went with them. But all along the way to the theatre, a constant cry was going up from my heart to the Lord to somehow save me from this situation.

When we reached the cinema theatre, we saw a notice pasted on the front wall, saying that because the reel of the movie had not arrived, the movie scheduled for that evening was cancelled. My friends were utterly disappointed as we returned home, but I was thrilled. I was overjoyed that God had done a miracle for me. This incident strengthened my faith greatly and I realized that I did indeed have a Father in heaven who would be “a very present help to me in my time of need” (Psa.46:1). He answered a cry that was *only in my heart* and that I had not even expressed with my lips.

That was my first experience of a miraculous answer to prayer. God is a Father Who does miracles for His children. The Bible says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart”. I was delighting myself in the Lord alone that day and wanted nothing but Him. The desire of my heart was that I should be kept from seeing that movie. And God granted it.

But after I came back to my room, the Lord told me that *He would not do that for me a second time*. Next time, He wanted me to say “No” to my friends *myself - for only thus could I grow strong in His grace*. If God did a miracle like that for me every time, I would never become bold or spiritually strong. The next time my friends invited me to the movies I told them boldly that I was now a Christian and would not go with them to the movies any more.

I understood then why God does not grant many of our prayer-requests - because they are actually asking God to do miracles that will make life easy for us. But if God granted all those requests, we would become fat and lazy Christians and not strong, vigorous and bold as He wants us to be. God *will* encourage us by giving us miraculous answers to prayer occasionally. But many a time, He does not grant our request, lest we remain weak and cowardly. Understanding this truth has solved many mysteries about prayer for me.

In these past 46 years, *God has answered ALL my prayers* – yes, 100% of them. Are you surprised to hear that? Let me explain. Like the three colours in traffic lights, God’s answer to me has, at times been “Yes” (Green), sometimes “Wait” (Orange) and at times “No” (Red). But He has answered *every* prayer.

There is great safety in obeying the traffic lights. I have found great safety in accepting God’s answers as well – whatever they be.



Midshipman (1958-59)

CHAPTER 4 Step-By-Step Obedience

I have discovered through the years that God leads us one step at a time. His promise is: *“As you go, step by step I will open up the way before you”* (Proverbs 4:12 - *Literal translation*). The pillar of cloud led the Israelites day by day. So does the Holy Spirit lead us today.

Soon after I received the assurance of salvation, I was told that the next step for me was to be baptized in water. I had been christened as a baby in the Syrian Orthodox church - a ceremony that they called *“baptism”*. And I knew that there were born-again Christians on both sides of this theological fence – those who were *“baptized”* only as babies like me and those who were baptized as believers. I decided therefore to study the Word of God on this subject to see what it said.

As I studied the Word, I discovered a number of truths: First of all, there was not a single mention of child-baptism in the entire New Testament. A few instances of baptism of entire families were there, but there was no mention of whether there were any babies in those families - and we cannot prove any doctrine from the silences of Scripture. John the Baptist baptized only adults. Jesus Himself was baptized only when He was an adult. Jesus baptized adults but only laid hands on (blessed) children. (Many churches however do the exact opposite: they baptize children and lay hands on adults (confirmation)!) When God blotted out my past completely, that included my unscriptural child-baptism as well!! The first step of obedience that every believer took in *Acts of the Apostles* was water-baptism.

All this convinced me that I needed to be baptized. But some child-baptized believers told me that there was a far greater need for preaching the gospel in the Orthodox churches than in the believers' assemblies; and if I got baptized, I would be expelled from the Orthodox church and would then lose opportunities to give the gospel to the unbelievers there. This seemed a very convincing argument - and so I decided not to be baptized.

I remained thus for 18 months. But every time I knelt down to pray, I felt as if God was saying to me: *“If you are not listening to Me, why should I listen to you.”* And in all those 18 months I made NO spiritual progress at all. This began to disturb me. Finally I told the Lord that I would obey Him, even if I was thrown out of every church in the world. And so in January 1961 I got baptized.

After that, I began to grow in my Christian life by leaps and bounds. I then realized that I could not possibly be a blessing to others, if I was disobedient to God's commands myself. I decided thereafter that I would obey God's Word immediately in every matter – big or small – whatever men or churches may say. How much spiritual loss we suffer when we listen to the arguments of human reason and disobey God's Word.

Since that first step of obedience 43 years ago, God has shown me many more steps of obedience. But each time, He showed me the next step, only after I had taken the step He had already shown me. God's Word is *“a lamp to our feet”* (Psa.119:105), meaning that it shows us *only the next step for our feet* and not the whole road in front of us. This is like holding a torch and walking along a dark road. We can see only a little bit of the road at a time – just enough for the next step. To see more of the road ahead, we have to move forward.

If I had not taken that first step of obedience, I might never have seen another step in God's will for my life – and I would have wasted my days on earth, even if I did go to heaven. If God has clearly shown you some step of obedience now, obey Him immediately, lest you miss the will of God for your life.

Obedience is a step-by-step matter.

CHAPTER 5 Clearing My Debts

In early 1961, immediately after my baptism, the Lord showed me the next step that I had to take in my walk with Him. My debt to God had been cleared - completely. It was now time to clear my debts to man - equally completely.

I remembered that I had cheated the government of money in the past. Jesus said that we had to “*give to Caesar what was Caesar’s*” first, before we could “*give to God what was God’s*” (*Matt.22:21*). Otherwise we will be giving God money that we have stolen from “*Caesar*”. So I calculated how much I had to pay back to the government. I hesitated between two figures - one of them 20% more than the other. Finally, true to human nature, I chose the lower figure. One day I read in *Numbers 5: 6,7*, that God had commanded the Israelites that when making restitution, they were to add 20% to what they owed!! This was a clear and direct word from God to my heart: He wanted me to pay back the higher amount. This amount came to about four times my monthly salary! So I began to save as much as possible each month, so that I could repay my debt as soon as possible.

When I had finally saved up the amount, I faced another problem. The government did not have any department where honest people who wanted to make restitution could repay their debts!! So I went to the railway station and bought a number of tickets for a long train journey to the other end of India (that covered the amount that I had to make restitution for). Then I tore up those tickets. That way I ensured that the money went to the government’s coffers. My bank account was now empty, but my heart was full – with the joy of the Lord.

It was only when Zaccheus decided to repay all those whom he had cheated that the Lord said, “*Salvation has come – for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (*Lk.19:9,10*). Like all human beings, Zaccheus was lost in the love of money and Jesus saved him from it. I too was lost in the love of money, and Jesus saved me from it. “*The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil*” (*1 Tim.6:10*), and the Lord wants to save us from it. Only then can He say that “*salvation has come*”. He alone can root out this evil completely from our hearts. But He will do it only for those who ask Him to do it.

Debts are not only financial. Sometimes, what we owe may be an apology. When I was a young boy, I used to collect stamps, and I had once stolen a stamp (of almost no value) from a friend’s collection. The Lord reminded me of this small matter and told me to confess this sin (that I had committed more than 10 years earlier) to that person and to ask his forgiveness. This was even more difficult for me to do than repaying money to the government – for this involved my having to humble myself before another person. But I decided to write that letter of apology. Again the joy of the Lord filled my heart.

In some cases, it may be impossible for us to make restitution for the wrongs that we have committed. In such cases, we must not allow Satan to harass us perpetually, but accept God’s forgiveness and be at rest. God will show us the matters that we need to set right. And when He shows us some matter, He will test us to see whether we will humble ourselves and obey Him immediately - whatever the cost.

If I had not obeyed God promptly in these two matters, I would have dragged a chain behind me, these 43 years. And I would have missed God’s calling for my life. And the

Lord would not have given me the ministry that He did. What regret would then have plagued my mind for all eternity in heaven.

God wants His children to be free from debt to all men. Is there some debt from your past that needs to be settled? Settle it immediately, lest you miss your calling in life and have many regrets in eternity. Now is the time for total obedience! Large doors swing on small hinges!

CHAPTER 6

To Buy Or Not To Buy

In early 1961, when working at the Naval Base at Bombay, I saw an accordion in a shop-window of a music shop. I thought of buying it to learn how to play it. I knew however, that as a child of God I should seek God's will in all matters – both great and small. So I prayed and sought God's will. But I did not know how to find God's will in such matters. So I asked God for a sign. I told Him that if the price of the accordion was within a certain amount, then I would assume that it was His will for me to buy it. If it cost more than that amount, then I would assume that God did not want me to buy it. Since I was very eager to buy the accordion, I eagerly hoped that it would cost less than the figure I had quoted to the Lord.

But the lowest price the shop was willing to sell it for, was slightly above the amount I had quoted to God. I began to think of a number of factors. First of all, I did have enough money with me to buy it. Secondly, the government had banned the import of accordions and so this was probably the last accordion available in any shop in Bombay. Thirdly, I wanted to learn the instrument only for use in Christian meetings.

But all these factors were overruled by the fact that I had asked God for a sign and the sign was not fulfilled. So I decided not to buy the accordion – and walked out of the shop. I was disappointed that I could not get the accordion but happy that I had obeyed the Lord.

A few days later, I was witnessing about Christ to one of my non-Christian colleagues. He asked me a question from the Bible for which I did not know the answer. I was ashamed that as a Christian, I did not know the answer to something from the Bible. I went back to my room and decided to study the Word thoroughly, so that thereafter, I would know the answer to every question for which there was an answer in the Bible.

From the time I received assurance of my salvation in 1959, I had found a desire within me to read God's Word daily. First of all, I had decided to read through the whole Bible quickly - and had done so in about 6 months. I understood very little of what I read - but my faith was strengthened by whatever I read. But I was not a deep student of the Word.

But now, the study of God's Word became my passion. I began to spend hours with the Bible, day and night, in my spare time. I saved some money and bought a *Young's Concordance* and used it to study the occurrence of different words in the Bible. Very soon I, who knew almost nothing of the Bible, began to understand deep truths from the Scriptures.

Then I realized why God had not wanted me to buy the accordion. If I had bought it, I would have spent hours learning to play it more and more perfectly. And as all musicians know very well, there is no end to being perfect in playing any instrument. That is an endless pursuit. I would have become a slave to the accordion.

Interestingly enough, six years later, I was able to buy an accordion from someone who sold his instrument to me. But by then I had become so deeply devoted to the Word that the accordion could not master me. It was my slave. I never became an expert musician, because God had something better for me, which I never knew in 1961. Today, how thankful I am, that I am a Bible-teacher and not a musician and that I spent my life studying the Bible and not music. There are many good Christian musicians but not many anointed Bible-teachers.

Large doors swing on small hinges.

CHAPTER 7

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit

In early 1963 I was posted in the Naval Base at Cochin. I had been studying the Word seriously for more than two years and had developed a fairly good knowledge of it – good enough to be able to preach at meetings in the church. But I found a great lack of *power* in my ministry. In the church I attended, we studied the Bible, but it was like studying a history book – all intellectual! The messages I heard in the church-meetings too were heavy and boring, lacking the freshness and fire of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told the Sadducees once that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God (*Mt.22:29*). In my case, I knew the Scriptures - to some extent - but I certainly did not know the *power* of God. Jesus told His disciples that they would receive power only when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:5, 8*). But I discovered that different Christian churches taught differently on this subject. Some taught that every born-again Christian was automatically baptized in the Spirit at new birth whether he realized it or not. Others taught that one had to seek the Lord specifically for the baptism in the Spirit *after* being born again. I was confused. But I saw that Jesus Himself was anointed with the Spirit before He began His ministry (*Acts 10:38*). Then how much more I needed this! Jesus also said that *everyone* who believed in Him could have rivers of living water flowing out from him. But I found only a trickle flowing out from me. I realized that I was missing something. And so I decided to seek God for His power, without getting bogged down in a theological argument about the Holy Spirit. I wanted the rivers.

I visited a group of assemblies that emphasized the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to see if they could help me. They were very zealous, but I was disappointed with much that I saw in their midst. There was a lot of noise and emotionalism, but hardly any emphasis on victory over sin or Christlikeness of character (which is what the Holy Spirit came to give us primarily). Many of their pastors also seemed to be great lovers of money! One pastor asked me to keep on repeating the word “Hallelujah” if I wanted to be baptized in the Spirit! I refused to do that, since I knew that that was not the way the apostles received the baptism in the Spirit. All this was certainly not the fulness of the Spirit that I was looking for. But the counterfeit only proved to me that the genuine article must be valuable - for people make counterfeits only of valuable articles! I told God that I did NOT want what I saw in those groups, but I did want the genuine baptism in the Holy Spirit that the apostles received on the day of Pentecost. And I cried out to God every day for that.

I saw from the Scriptures that Jesus was anointed with the Spirit when He chose to be baptized in water - which symbolized His choosing the way of death to the Self-life. The Lord showed me then that the Spirit-filled life was closely connected with the way of the cross. He told me that if I chose the way of the cross at all times, I would have His power upon me always too.

God filled me with His Spirit at that time. There was no physical manifestation. But I found a freshness, a liberty and a boldness in my ministry thereafter. I began to experience the gift of prophesying - to edify and encourage and challenge others (*1 Cor.14:3*). I loved Jesus more fervently and I longed to serve Him wholeheartedly. The way of the cross became precious to me. And I had a burning passion to bring others to Christ. I did not speak in tongues at that time. That came 11 years later.

What I experienced then was only a beginning. Since then I have had to be filled with the Spirit again and again and again. (We read in *Acts* of three times when Peter was filled

with the Spirit.) A cup, a well and a river can all be full. Yet the capacity of each is different. As our capacity grows, we need to be re-filled. My capacity at that time was only that of a cup – but it was full and running over! It would grow into a river in later years.

CHAPTER 8 A Wide Open Door

Many young people complain that older brothers hinder them from having a ministry in the church. But ministry comes to us from the Lord and *not* from man. If the Lord has determined to anoint you and to give you a ministry, no man can hinder God's purpose for your life. He Himself will open the right door for you – at the right time. You won't have to push your way through anywhere and you won't have to go around asking people to give you a ministry! And you will never have to complain that someone else hindered you from having a ministry. The Lord Jesus is the One Who has the key to every door of ministry (*Rev.3:7,8*) and He can open them for us just like the automatic doors that open by themselves as soon as we come near them. We don't have to do anything to open these doors! One reason why God does not give a ministry to many young people is because they are not seeking *Him* primarily but a ministry – and that too, in order to get honour for themselves.

In 1963, I was 23 years old and had been converted for 4 years. The elders in my local church would not allow me to speak in our church meetings, because they considered me young and inexperienced. So I used to visit the homes of nominal Christians and new believers in distant places (where no-one else wanted to go) and conducted Bible-studies for 3 or 4 people in their homes every week. It was thus that I first learnt to preach God's Word.

In August 1963, I was on leave from the Navy and decided to visit the "*Hebron Church*" in Hyderabad for some fellowship with God's people there. *Hebron* was the headquarters church of Brother Bakht Singh, who was India's most well-known church-leader. But he himself was not in Hyderabad when I went there. On Sunday morning, the elder brother in the *Hebron* church asked me to give the main message at the meeting. I had spoken at some smaller meetings in their church at Madras and he must have heard of some blessing that had resulted from those meetings. But the church in Hyderabad was a large one with over one thousand members and I had never ever spoken to such a large crowd.

As I sought the Lord for a word, I felt urged to speak on the subject of living a sacrificial life. So I spoke that morning on "*offering to the Lord that which costs us something*" - based on David's words in *2Samuel 24:24*. There was an unusual anointing on the message that morning and a spirit of repentance and revival came upon the people in the meeting. I was amazed at what I saw. When the elder brother saw what the Lord had done, he immediately announced that there would be two more special meetings with me as the speaker – one that evening and one the next evening. The hall was packed full at each of those evening meetings. This was most unusual for weekday meetings. God's anointing was again mightily present at both those meetings. I was amazed to see the moving of God, for I had never experienced such revival anywhere before.

I left Hyderabad the next day for Madras where I met Brother Bakht Singh. He had heard about the revival and asked me why I had come away from Hyderabad at such a time, instead of staying on and continuing with the revival meetings. But I was young and unaccustomed to revival and did not know what to do. However this experience encouraged me to believe that God wanted to use me in His service. And as news about the revival began to spread, many doors began to open for me in the different assemblies.

I did not go to Hyderabad looking for a ministry. I desired only God Himself. But God had plans to use me in His service and He knew when I was ready for it. And at the right

time – the time He had determined – He opened a door of ministry for me, *without my making any effort whatsoever.*

No-one can hinder God's plan for your life and your ministry, if you trust Him.

CHAPTER 9

Answered Prayer

While working in the Naval Base at Cochin, I was very eager to attend the Spiritual Life Conference (called “*Holy Convocation*”) at “Hebron Fellowship” in Hyderabad (the headquarters of Brother Bakht Singh’s churches) in October 1963. So I applied for leave on October 1, and was granted leave for the period of the conference. But one week later, Naval Headquarters sent an order stating that the Navy had to take part in an exhibition in Mysore in October. Another officer from my office had to take part in this exhibition and I had to fill in for him, and so my leave was cancelled. So I gave up all hopes of attending the conference at *Hebron*.

On October 12, in my morning quiet time, I was reading my daily portion in 2 *Samuel* chapter 2. The first verse said, “*David inquired of the Lord, saying, ‘Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?’ And the Lord said unto him, ‘Go up’*”. I wondered if this was the Lord telling me to go for the conference, or whether it was just my mind finding a verse to satisfy my own desires (as had sometimes happened to me in the past). So I prayed about it and read further. The verse went on to say: “*And David said, ‘Whither shall I go up?’ And the Lord said, ‘Unto Hebron’*”. The mention of *Hebron* here amazed me. Perhaps the Lord did indeed want me to go to the “*Hebron Fellowship*” for the conference. So I prayed saying, “Lord, if my leave has been cancelled according to Thy will, I accept it gladly. But if this is Satan’s attempt to prevent me from going to *Hebron*, then I resist him in Thy Name”. I knew that the Lord had urged us to pray together with other believers when we face difficult situations (*Matt.18:19*). So I did that too.

Amazingly, two days later, an order came from Naval Headquarters that the Navy would *not* take part in the exhibition at Mysore. Thus I got my leave to go for the conference. I was amazed at what God would do at the highest levels to help one of His young, insignificant children!

At that conference, Brother Bakht Singh *broke* a practice that he had always followed at every conference that he had conducted during the previous 15 years. In every conference, he himself was always the speaker at the *evening* meetings (where the crowd was the largest and the need was the greatest). He never gave that important ministry to even his seniormost co-workers. But at this conference he asked me to speak at one of the evening meetings. I was only 23 years old and it was the first time that I was speaking to such a large crowd of more than 5000 people. God anointed me and gave me great liberty to speak His Word.

The message I gave there, “*A New Vessel Full Of Salt*” can be read at my website : <http://poonen.org/zac>

The unusual liberty and anointing I had at that meeting and the response from the people encouraged me greatly. Bakht Singh also recognized this and asked me to speak with him at public meetings thereafter in many other places. I knew now that God had anointed me to be a minister of His Word. I was young and I needed such an assurance from God Himself - by His confirming the word that I spoke. This assurance helped me greatly to be clear concerning the Lord’s call 7 months later, when He called me to leave the Navy to serve Him full-time. I also learnt through this experience something of the tremendous power there is in *the prayer of faith*, and in *praying together with others*. All the authority of Christ comes down to back up His children when they pray together with each other in unity and in faith.

This was a significant event in my life. If the Naval participation in that exhibition had *not* been cancelled in October 1963, I would not have been able to go that conference. And then I may not have got the assurance that God had planned a wider ministry for me. Further, if I had not had the habit of listening to God each day and praying on the basis of His word to me, I might never have prayed that God would change my circumstances. Thus I might still have missed God's plan for me at that time. If God had not miraculously opened that door of opportunity for me at that time to serve Him, I might have ended up being merely an Admiral in the Navy instead of being a servant of the Most High God. Large doors swing on small hinges.

CHAPTER 10

Boldness To Witness

In the year 1964, I was working in the Naval Base in Cochin. I was a keen student of the Word and when I found truths in the Word that blessed me, I was eager to share them with others in the church I was attending. But since I was young, I was not given many opportunities to preach there. So I decided to preach on the streets, where I did not need anyone's permission to preach. Twice every week, when my work finished at noon, I would skip lunch, spend 2 to 3 hours in prayer and go and preach on the streets for two hours. I would take another brother with me to translate my preaching into Malayalam. We would stand on a street-corner and start by singing a chorus. Five or ten people would soon gather around us, and I would preach the gospel to them for about five minutes. We would distribute some tracts and gospels and move on to the next street and do the same there.

Initially, I used to go far away from the Naval Base where no-one knew me, because I lacked the boldness to preach before people who knew me. But I kept on asking God to give me this boldness. God answered my prayer in a two-fold way. I had already known a measure of the anointing of the Holy Spirit (as described in an earlier article). But I found that I needed to be filled with the Spirit *again* in order to be bold (as the apostles needed, even *after* the day of Pentecost - *See Acts 4:31*). Secondly, God gave me a revelation of the total authority of Christ. Interestingly, I saw this wonderful truth through *Genesis 41:44*, where Pharaoh tells Joseph: "*Without your permission, no-one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land.*" I saw Joseph there as a type of Christ. So the message I got from that verse was that without Christ's permission, no-one could lift a hand or a tongue to mock me or hurt me. When people called me a devil for the first time on the streets, I knew they did so because God had permitted them to do so. This revelation helped me immensely to face opposition later in my ministry.

Then I understood why Jesus first told His apostles that He had "*all authority in heaven and on earth*" *before* He told them to go and make disciples in every nation (*Matt.28:18-20*). So I knew then that Christ's authority would back me, wherever I went to preach for Him. The anointing of the Holy Spirit and the assurance of Christ's authority backing me, finally gave me the boldness to stand near the Naval Base and to preach. My senior officers and the sailors who worked under me, all saw me there. But that did not disturb me anymore.

Then the Lord told me to write two verses on my scooter. So I wrote "*PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD*" on one panel of my scooter and "*CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS*" on the other (in large letters). When my Naval Commander saw this, he ordered me to remove the verses "*in 24 hours*". I told him respectfully that God had told me to write them. The next day, when he saw that the verses were still on my scooter, he "*marched me in*" before the Captain of the Base. (This is the first step before a court-martial, for disobedience of orders). I gave the Captain also the same answer respectfully. The Captain was merciful and did not court-martial me. But he said that he would not allow me to ride the scooter inside the Naval Base. So I left my scooter outside the Base in a friend's house and started riding a bicycle inside the Base.

I was disappointed at the turn of events, because I felt the Devil had won by preventing me from proclaiming the gospel through those verses to all in the Naval Base. But God turned the tables on Satan – as He always does. When people in the Base saw me riding a cycle, they were curious to know why, and asked what had happened. Soon the verses

written on my scooter began to spread from mouth to mouth and went around the Base faster than if others had seen them on my scooter. Some of my fellow-officers whom I met many years later, still remembered them! Thus God frustrated Satan's plan. God also made me a bolder Christian thus – even more free from the opinions of men. And this boldness has helped me immensely in my ministry ever since.

The *anointing of the Spirit* and the *authority of Christ* have been my strength and support whenever I have stood up to preach, in every part of the world. But I first learnt the reality of these, on the streets of Ernakulam, more than forty years ago.



Bible Verses on the Scooter – July 1964

CHAPTER 11

Called to Leave the Navy

It was the morning of 6th May 1964. I was on vacation from the Navy and had just finished preaching at a series of special meetings in a small town near Bangalore, along with Brother Bakht Singh. I was traveling by train from there to Bangalore along with a number of his co-workers. As I was meditating on my daily Bible-portion for that day (*Isaiah 49*), I got a strong feeling that God was calling me to leave my job to serve Him fulltime. I had been considering full-time service for some time and had told the Lord as



early as July 1959 (as soon as I received the assurance of my salvation) that I was willing to resign from the Indian Navy any time He called me. But I decided that I would leave only if the Lord called me.

I had already given up my other ambitions - of traveling the seas, seeing the world, earning plenty of money and becoming the Admiral of the Indian Navy. But I needed to know whether God wanted me in full-time service for Him. As I preached God's Word in different places, I found the Lord blessing my ministry. I also found a growing burden in my heart to spread God's Word throughout India.

It was in this state of mind that I read *Isaiah 49* that morning. The Lord spoke to me through that chapter that He had called me from my mother's womb to be His servant (*v.1,5*) and that He had made my mouth like a sharp sword (*v.2*). I did not give any thought to some of the other promises in that chapter - that God would proclaim His salvation through me to the far ends of the earth (*v.6*), that people would come to hear His Word from the Northern and Western countries of the world and from China (*v.12*); that God would fight against all those who fought with me and that all my sons would be saved (*v.25*). I now see, 40 years later, that God has fulfilled all those promises too. But on that day (6th May 1964), I saw only one thing in *Isaiah 49* - that God was calling me to serve Him full-time. I

decided then and there to resign from the Navy.

A few minutes after I had made this decision, Brother Bakht Singh (who was travelling with us in the train) came to me and asked me, "When are you thinking of leaving the Navy?" I was surprised to hear him ask me that question, for I had never shared my thoughts on this subject with him or with anyone else. Bakht Singh was the one man I respected at that time as a genuine man of God. And his words were a confirmation to me from the Lord, that what I had heard a few minutes earlier in my heart was indeed the voice of God. I am glad that I heard from the Lord *FIRST* before He confirmed His word to me through His servant - just like Paul and Barnabas got a confirmation of their call from other prophets, only *AFTER* they had heard God's call directly (*See Acts 13:2*).

In the succeeding days, God confirmed His call to me again - through another Scripture : The Lord asking Peter to come out of the boat and to walk on the water (*Matt.14:29*). The Lord was calling me also to come out of the boat I worked in, to live a life of faith ("walking on the water") - looking to Him alone for all my needs.

I submitted my resignation to the Indian Naval authorities promptly, stating that the Lord Jesus Christ had called me for His work. But that made no sense to Naval Headquarters and they rejected my application immediately. I wondered what to do next. The Lord then reminded me of what Moses did when Pharaoh refused to allow the Israelites to go and serve God: Moses went back to Pharaoh again. So I applied again, giving the same reasons in greater detail. Cadet-entry officers like me were required to serve the Navy for a minimum of 20 years before we could resign, because of the large amount of money that the Defence Ministry had invested on our training. So my application was rejected once again. I continued to pray and applied a third time, some months later. Amazingly, in May 1966, the Navy released me. That was a miracle, for I was the only cadet-entry officer in the history of the Indian Navy who had been permitted to resign on such grounds. That became then a further confirmation to me of God's call.

The clear assurance that God called me to His service is what has upheld me in the many trials that I have faced as a servant of the Lord. And that is why I have always urged believers never to enter full-time service for the Lord, until they have a clear call from God. If God calls you, He will support you in His service, until the end of your life. Serving the Lord has been a most satisfying experience for me, for more than 38 years now.



*Award for "Best All-Round Cadet" (May 1958)
- The first step to becoming an Admiral !!*

CHAPTER 12

Directed by God

I left the Indian Navy to serve the Lord fulltime in May 1966. I was single and decided to live in Vellore (Tamilnadu) as a base from which to travel around serving the Lord. In October 1967, I was invited to speak at a camp organized for students and graduates by the Evangelical Graduates Fellowship in Ahmedabad. So I took the train and reached Ahmedabad early in the morning after a two-day journey. As soon as I arrived there, on the very first day of the camp, I got an urgent telegram from my father (who was also living in Vellore) that he had been diagnosed with cancer by the doctors at CMC Hospital Vellore and needed to be operated on urgently. Since I was his eldest son (and the only one of his three children in India), he requested me to come home immediately to be with him at the time of his operation.

I wondered what to do. Since there was one more speaker at the camp, the organizers of the camp would have understood my situation and allowed me to go, if I had asked them to relieve me of my responsibilities as a speaker – although the burden on the other speaker would then have been immense. But I wanted to know whether this was a scheme of Satan to prevent me from speaking at the camp. So I sought the Lord about it.

I had the habit of reading through the Scriptures, chapter by chapter every morning. My daily reading that day was *Deuteronomy Chapter 1*. I read there in *verses 3 and 7*: “*On the FIRST DAY OF THE ELEVENTH MONTH, God said, Turn and set your journey and go...*”. I wondered whether God was showing me there as to when I should start my return journey. I did not have the habit of finding guidance from verses of Scripture taken out of context, for I knew that that was a dangerous practice. But I also knew that God did guide His servants *on rare occasions* through such means. So I prayed and sought the Lord’s will. As I prayed about it, I felt an increasing assurance and peace in my heart that this was indeed guidance from the Lord. So I went to the railway station and booked my return journey for the first day of the eleventh month (November) – which was the second-last day of the camp. This meant that I would stay on in Ahmedabad for the entire period of the camp and would miss only one meeting on the last morning of the camp. So I sent a telegram to my father to postpone his operation to the first week of November, since I could come back only by then. [Let me give you a warning here: Don’t read spectacular guidance into every verse that you read in the Bible. God has given me such spectacular guidance through a verse, on only two or three occasions in my 46 years as a believer.]

I spoke at the various sessions in the camp throughout the week – and the blessing of the Lord flowed in our midst. Thirty years later, I met people who told me how they were blessed and challenged by my ministry at that camp. I finally left Ahmedabad on the first of November and reached Vellore two days later.

When my father got my telegram and realized that I would not be back for a whole week, he decided to use the time to get the opinion of yet another doctor. So he sent his X-rays to another radiologist (a better one) for a second opinion. This doctor looked at the X-rays and told my father that he was certain that there was no cancer and that there was no need for any operation. Thus my father was saved from going to the operating table. He lived for another 15 years after that and never got cancer.

If I had returned to Vellore as soon as I had got my father’s telegram, my aged father would have underwent an unnecessary operation. And who knows what complications

that might have led to, at his age. And the young people at the camp would not have heard what the Lord wanted to tell them through me.

It is good to seek the will of God in even the smallest matters of life – for there may be big doors that turn on those small hinges.

CHAPTER 13

The Importance of Small Decisions

Even small decisions that we take in our younger days are important, because some of those decisions can take us completely out of God's will for our lives finally. And so we must never be in a hurry when taking a decision, but always wait on the Lord and seek His will in patience, before deciding.

After I left the Navy, I did not know how to start doing the Lord's work. I did not know where to begin or even where to stay. Then an elder brother (whom I knew) invited me to come and stay with him in his church for a short while, to wait on the Lord. So I went to his assembly and spent about a month there in prayer, with some periods of fasting. At the end of that period of prayer, I was still not sure what to do. But my heart was at peace, assured that the Lord would show me His plan for my life, in due course. So I continued to live from day to day, without being anxious about the morrow. I realize now that God allows such periods of uncertainty to test our motives and to teach us patience. So my time of prayer and fasting was most profitable and God protected me from making mistakes in the decisions that I took in the following weeks and years.

Trusting The Lord to Teach Me His Word

Someone suggested to me at that time that I should join a Bible-college first of all and get a degree, because that would be a good preparation for my ministry and would also give me many openings for ministry. I had nothing against Bible-schools. But I knew that:

(1) *In the Old Testament*: No prophet ever came out of a Bible-school, even though there were such schools in Israel.

(2) *In the New Testament*: Jesus never sent any of His disciples to a Bible-school, even though Gamaliel was running such a school in Jerusalem at that time.

(3) *Today*: 99% of God's people are in secular employment and can never go to a Bible-school.

So I felt I should be an example to these 99% of God's people by demonstrating to them that one could serve the Lord effectively without attending a Bible-school. So I decided never to go to a Bible-school, but to trust the Holy Spirit to teach me His word and His ways, just as He taught the disciples in the first century. A top evangelical Bible-college in Canada then offered me a seat in their college, with full scholarship and airfare fully paid, to study there. This would have been a tempting offer for many Christians, but it was not for me now. So I rejected their offer. Another friend of mine took that seat in my place, and ended up settling down in Canada!! God saved me from that fate and from missing His will thereby! I am thankful that I never went to any Bible-school – for God has given me such amazing revelations from His Word that I could never have received, if my mind had been trained to think the way Bible-schools train their students to think. The men and women whose lives and writings have influenced me the most, have also been those who never went to a Bible-school themselves - Madam Guyon, Charles Finney, D.L.Moody, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Watchman Nee, A.W.Tozer, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Bakht Singh etc.,

Trusting The Lord to Provide My Earthly Needs

Another truth that I saw in God's Word was that Jesus and His apostles never made their earthly needs known to any human being – either their personal needs or their

ministry needs. They trusted their heavenly Father alone to meet all their needs. I had given away all my earnings (in the 8 years that I worked in the Navy) for the Lord's work and to poor believers. So I had left the Navy with an empty bank account and no savings. But I believed that if the Indian Navy had been faithful to take care of all my earthly needs when I served them, my heavenly Father would be even more faithful when I served Him.

So I decided never to make my financial needs known to anyone but my heavenly Father, Who knew exactly how and when to meet my needs. I used to receive occasional gifts from some believers, but that came to only about 15% of what I was earning in the Navy. But I learnt to live simply and so I never suffered any lack.

One day, the Chairman of a large Western organization that was involved in a wide Christian radio ministry in India invited me to become the Director of their organization. I was offered a large salary plus house-rent, free car, free telephone and other perquisites. I greatly appreciated the work of this organization. But if I joined it, I would be engaged primarily in administrative work and promotional work in different churches. God had however called me to preach his Word, and not to sit behind a desk doing administration. Here was a tempting offer. God was probably testing me to see what I would choose - a comfortable life or His perfect will. I rejected the offer and continued to trust the Lord for my needs. I would not sacrifice my calling for any material benefit or financial gain.

For nearly 40 years now, the Lord has taken care of all my needs and the needs of my family as well - and I have proved His faithfulness time and again.

Young people are often tempted to compromise on the principles of God's Word - especially when they see older servants of God doing so. But if you trust in the Lord and stick to the principles of His Word, you will find that God will do many miracles for you. You will know God better thereby and your ministry too will be enriched.

So, let me encourage every young person never to compromise on the principles of God's Word, at any cost.

CHAPTER 14

To Marry Or Not To Marry

One day in 1963, when I was still working in the Naval Base at Cochin, I was meditating on God's Word and came to *Jeremiah 16:2* which read thus: "*You shall not take a wife for yourself, nor have sons or daughters in this place*". I used to find, in my Bible-reading, at times, that a verse would stick out and make a deep impression on me. This was one such verse. So I began to wonder if this was a word from the Lord to me personally. As I sought the Lord in prayer, I felt that it was indeed a word for me. So I decided to remain single for the rest of my life in order to serve the Lord. I was already active in the Lord's work and was delighted that I could spend the rest of my life "*in undistracted devotion to the Lord*", without any of the distractions that married life can bring (as mentioned in *1 Cor.7:32-35*).

As a 24-year old young man, I had the normal desires that all young men of that age have. But now that I had received this word from the Lord, I totally stopped looking at young sisters as prospective life-partners. I came across many attractive young sisters as I traveled around. But I never considered even one of them for a moment, because I wanted to be true to God's call on my life. When speaking at meetings, I would look only at the brothers and never even look at the sisters!

Because I was earning a large salary as a naval officer, I received marriage proposals even at a young age. But I rejected all of them, without even stopping to consider them. I told everyone that God had called me to remain single. I made this fact known in my local church as well, so that all the young sisters there (and their parents) would also know my calling. I was then able to speak more freely with them, and had no fear that I might be giving ideas to any of them. I was spared from many a temptation too, because of this word that I received from the Lord. Thus God kept me in my youthful years in single-minded devotion to Him alone, and I could spend all my spare time praying and studying God's Word.

In May 1966, I left the Navy to serve the Lord full time. Since I was NOT earning any salary now, and was ministering among very poor people in the villages of India, I was sure that no-one would ever again consider me for marriage. I was also losing my hair and growing balder every month. This too was an advantage, for I felt that it would disqualify me even further in the eyes of young sisters!! But as I traveled around and spoke at meetings and conferences during the next 12 to 15 months, I found that, despite all the above disqualifications, I was still being "eyed" by some parents who were looking for "a gifted servant of the Lord" for their daughter – even if he was bald!! So I had to be careful once more.

I had also heard of preachers falling into immorality – and I knew that I had the same flesh that they had. I discovered then that there were many dangers a single young man faced when serving the Lord fulltime. So I sought the Lord again as to what I should do. As I continued praying, I felt the Lord urging me to consider marriage. But this appeared to contradict what the Lord had told me four years earlier, from *Jeremiah 16:2*.

So I re-read *Jeremiah 16:2* – again and again. All of a sudden, I noticed something in that verse that I had never noticed before. I now saw that the Lord's command was not to marry "*in this place*" – that is, while I was in the Navy. That liberated me from the fear that I would be disobeying the Lord if I got married. I wondered then why the Lord had

not allowed me to understand this last phrase of the verse in this way for four long years. I saw two reasons:

1.The Lord wanted me to believe that I was really going to be single all my life – so that I would never consider any girl during my entire naval career. This was to save me from being distracted, so that I would concentrate on studying His Word. He had planned a teaching ministry for me in the future, which I never knew of then; and He wanted me to be grounded in His Word during my single days, because He knew that I would not have much free time to study the Word once I was married.

2.The Lord was testing me to see if I was willing to give up marriage altogether for His sake - just like He tested Abraham to see whether He would sacrifice Isaac. After testing me for four years, when God saw that I was willing, He gave this “*Isaac*” back to me and told me to consider marriage.

What a privilege it is to be led by God, step by step, as He led His prophets and saints in olden times.

CHAPTER 15

God's Choice Of A Life-Partner

I had laid marriage on God's altar as a young man. But God gave marriage back to me at the right time and gave me the best wife I could possibly have got. I am glad I allowed God to choose for me - for I got the best.

I had seen so many unhappy marriages and so many wives who were a drag on their husband's ministry, that I was afraid that I too (in a moment of weakness) might choose the wrong girl. So I used to pray to the Lord desperately that He would even send an earthquake (if necessary), at the time of my wedding, if by some mistake I had chosen a girl that was not His choice for me.

In the Indian Christian culture of the 1960s, boys and girls were not allowed to converse with each other except formally. So it was not easy to know much about any girl. I prayed therefore that God Himself would give me enough information about any girl I considered so that I could "*prove His perfect will*" (Rom.12:2).

In mid-1967 (when I was 27½ years old), Brother Bakht Singh proposed a girl named "*Annie*" who had just graduated from the Christian Medical College at Vellore – and asked me to pray concerning her. I didn't care for the fact that she was a doctor, but I was impressed when I heard that she was very active in the Lord's work – in the church, among the students in her college and also in witnessing to prisoners in the women's jail. Around the same time, two staff members of the E.U.(Evangelical Union) also came to me (independent of each other) and suggested the same "*Annie*" to me. I prayed that God would give me more information about her so that I could know if this was His choice. Since my primary burden was for the poor people in India's villages, I wanted someone who had the same love and care for the poor.



Doctor Annie – serving the poor

I learnt that Annie had decided to work among lepers in a hospital in North India. From the age of 16, she had visited that hospital every year and done voluntary work there. (No lady-doctor had ever gone to work in that leprosy hospital before this). Annie had been warned by her relatives that working among lepers would hinder her chances of getting a good husband. But what her relatives considered as a disadvantage was *the very factor* that assured me of Annie's love for the poor.

Then one day, I happened to overhear a conversation between two brothers at the church in Vellore: One was telling the other of a sister named “Annie” who although she was a doctor, had sat beside the bed of a poor, sick sister (from the church), caring for her for many nights, in the poor people’s ward of the Vellore hospital. Those brothers did not know that I was considering this very same Annie as a marriage-partner! God had sovereignly arranged for me to hear that conversation, to assure me again of Annie’s concern for the poor.

I discovered later that Annie had read the same Christian books and missionary biographies that I had read. She had understood the way of the cross – just as I had. We both had the same passion to serve the Lord among the poor. I waited on the Lord now for a final confirmation of His will. This came to me one day from my daily reading in *Ezekiel 44:15,22*: “*They shall come near to Me to minister unto Me..... and they shall take maidens from the house of Israel for their wives.*” I was now convinced – and my heart was drawn to her.

God had so wonderfully prepared this young girl for 24 years, far away from me, and finally brought her to me. Just as He had prepared a perfect partner for Adam, He had also prepared a girl perfectly suited for me. I saw that God was not hindered by the limitations of Indian culture, and that He was still a loving Matchmaker Who brought man and woman together, as He did in Eden.

Annie had heard me preach a number of times and so she knew that the Lord had gifted me to serve Him. But she knew almost nothing else about me. So I told her plainly that I had no income but was trusting the Lord alone to provide all my needs. I told her that I was not sure as to what my ministry was going to be. All I knew was that God had given me a burden for the poor and for college-students – both of whom had very little money to support me. I had no savings and my father was a retired pensioner with very little money himself. I painted before her a life of financial struggle and hardships, but coupled at the same time, with the immense joy of serving the Lord. I told her to wait on the Lord and to seek His will and not to decide in a hurry. Meanwhile she was receiving proposals from well-placed medical doctors. She prayed and waited on the Lord and was convinced that I was God’s choice for her – and told her parents so.

Her parents immediately objected to the proposal, because I had no income! They must have thought that I wanted to marry a doctor because of the money she could earn to support me. Little did they know that I would be trusting the Lord for my needs and not in any income that Annie could earn. (Annie has never earned any income as a doctor during the 37 years of our marriage. She has given medical help to thousands of poor people freely).

We decided to honour her parents and to wait until they accepted me – and we continued in prayer. Within six months, God answered our prayer and her father accepted the proposal. Four months later, we were married.

Brother Bakht Singh conducted our wedding at Vellore on 19 June 1968 and gave a prophecy at the wedding saying,

“They are being joined for the blessing of many people of many countries. And the light of God will shine brightly by their union in many parts of the world”.

We did not pay much attention to those words of his and had forgotten them completely, until we listened to our wedding tape again 30 years later. Suddenly we realized that his prophecy had been fulfilled.

I have met many women in my travels around the world in the last 37 years. But I never yet met one who was more suited for me than Annie – the one God chose for me.

How perfect is God's choice for those who put Him first in all matters! All praise be to His Name alone!



Wedding Conducted by Brother Bakht Singh at Vellore on 19 June 1968



Zac and Annie – June 1968

CHAPTER 16

Saved From Death

“He delivered us from death and will still deliver us” (2 Cor.1:10)

In all of our lives, there must have been occasions where we were saved from almost certain death by God’s intervention. I can think of a few such instances myself. God has a purpose in thus saving us.

The *first* incident I can think of was when I was about 12 years old in 1951. My parents and I were sitting outside our home at night with a table lamp for light. Suddenly the lamp went off, while there was still electricity inside the house. I felt this must be due to a break somewhere in the electrical cord of the lamp. Foolishly, I picked up the cord and felt my way along it to see where the break in the wire was. Suddenly when my fingers touched the broken part, the current ran through my body and threw me on the grass with the cord still clinging to my fingers. I screamed. My mother seeing what had happened, had the presence of mind to switch off the electrical main supply immediately. Thus my life was saved. I was not born again at that time. If I had died, I would have certainly gone to hell.

A *second* incident that I can remember was when I was in the Navy. I was posted as the Executive Officer of a minesweeper in Bombay during the war with Pakistan in 1965. Our Naval fleet had planned to bombard Karachi harbour. My ship’s job was to go ahead of the large ships in the fleet and to clear the mines that the enemy would have laid to protect their harbour. Only thus would our fleet be able to move in. Clearing the mines could be done easily, because we had both the equipment and the expertise in our ship to do the job. But our ship would have been an easy target for the long-range guns from Karachi that would be firing at our fleet. And our ship would almost certainly have been sunk. That would be the price we would have to pay for clearing the way for the rest of the fleet to bombard the harbour. The war had been going on for about two weeks and we were all set to leave for Karachi, when a ceasefire was suddenly declared - and the war ended. My life was thus saved. If the war had continued for *even a few more days*, I would almost certainly have died outside Karachi harbour. But God had made a plan for my life from before the creation of the world – and in that plan *I was not to die then*. So He stopped that war *for my sake*. There is nothing that God will not do for His children.

A *third* incident also comes to my mind: This was in August 1993. I was riding my moped in Bangalore returning home from the market and going past a railway-crossing (about 700 metres from my house). I had crossed one side of the crossing and had gone across the railway lines. Just before crossing the other side, the gateman lowered the bar (without seeing me). The bar hit me squarely on my chest and hands and knocked me and my moped down on to the railway track, where my head hit the ground. I lay there unconscious. (I later found out that the gateman was not the regular gateman but a substitute who was not familiar with the procedure for opening and closing the gates). I still do not know for how long I lay there unconscious. Someone picked me up and I regained my consciousness. When I was taken to the hospital I discovered that my skull had a hairline crack in it and my shoulder was dislocated. But otherwise I was all right. I said to the Lord at that time, “Lord, I have not yet finished saying ‘Thank You’ to You for dying for me on Calvary. Give me a few more years to express my gratitude to You for that, by serving You.” My arm was in a sling for a few weeks and I was soon back to normal health in every way. The Lord has given me 12 more years of perfect health thus far, since that date, to serve Him and to show my gratitude to Him for saving me.

Besides these incidents, I can think of numerous occasions, when riding my scooter in Bangalore, where God saved me from accidents – once when my brake-wire snapped and at other times when the carelessness of other drivers threw me off my scooter. I have driven cars and scooters for 43 years now. But by God's immense mercy, I have never been seriously hurt myself and have never hurt anyone else either.

These incidents are constant reminders to me that I might not be living on earth today, if small things had been otherwise at any of the above times. I have often thought back to these incidents and asked myself why God saved my life. It was certainly not that I might live for myself *but that I might live only for Him*.

Recollecting these instances now and then has helped me again and again to devote myself to live for the Lord alone.

We should all remember such instances when God has saved us from certain death and ask ourselves why God spared our lives. Such memories will help us all to re-dedicate our lives to the Lord again and again.

CHAPTER 17

A Time of Breaking and A New Burden

When I left the Navy, I had anticipated that I would be spending the rest of my life ministering among the assemblies connected with Brother Bakht Singh. But God does not show us the whole future – and I had some unexpected surprises awaiting me, sooner than I had anticipated.

In 1969, a young brother (from the Bakht-Singh assemblies) asked me what I felt would happen to those assemblies when Bakht Singh died. I told him that I felt that the assemblies would split and be divided, since only Bakht Singh himself could hold them all together. I should *not* have made such a rash comment about the work of a man of God. But I was only 30 years old and I was very unwise. Some of Bakht Singh's co-workers heard about my comment and reported it promptly to Brother Bakht Singh – and he was greatly disturbed. He immediately told his co-workers not to allow me to speak any more in his assemblies. I was not welcome thereafter in the very assemblies where I had once been a conference speaker. Through my rash speech I had lost an open door for ministry. I repented of what I had done. But I had to sit thereafter at the back of the Bakht-Singh assembly at Vellore, and was never allowed to share the Word there again. God told me in those days *not* to get offended with this discipline but to keep my mouth shut. He told me to respect the elders of the assembly, and not to criticize them, but to maintain a good attitude towards them at all times. And I did that.

But I was confused now and wondered where my ministry would lie in the future. All the plans that I had made, when I had left the Navy 3 years earlier, now lay shattered at my feet. I had been married for just one year and my wife and I wondered what we were supposed to do next.

For about three years I sat at the back of that assembly in Vellore, with a good attitude towards the elders there. Many people there misunderstood why I was being disciplined – and I did not seek to explain anything to them but kept quiet. Those were the years in which God broke me and tested me to see whether I was satisfied with Him alone or whether I would hanker after a public ministry, such as I had had until then. In all of my Christian life, I had wanted *only the Lord* - and I was ready to prove it to Him now.

In those quiet years, I took whatever opportunities the Lord gave me to minister among students in the medical college campus at Vellore. As I ministered among them, I discovered a great need for Christian books written especially for the needs of Indian students. All the books available in Christian bookshops were written by Westerners, and not from an Indian perspective. Those books were also far too expensive for Indian students to purchase.

I had no ambition to write any book, because I knew very well that I was no writer. But I had a great burden for young students. So I decided to put down on paper whatever I had shared with students in my meetings among them, so that I could circulate it among them, for their private study.

Since I had no invitations to preach anywhere, I had plenty of time on my hands with nothing to do. So I started writing down first of all, the notes of a series of four messages I had given to students in the Christian Medical College, Vellore. It took me a long time to type those 60 to 70 pages – and then to correct and re-type them again – on an old typewriter that I had from my Navy days. But I finally finished the job after many months. I read and re-read my manuscript many times - and found that the Lord had

indeed helped me to transcribe my burden faithfully on to paper. I then wondered how best I could circulate this among the students. But God had something far better in mind for my manuscript that I didn't know about then – and He was showing me only one step at a time.....

Even though it was entirely my fault that I lost the open door of ministry among the Bakht Singh assemblies, I now see that *God was able to bring something glorious even out of my failure*. If I had continued in those assemblies, I might never have entered into a writing ministry. How great and how good is our God!!

I can now say like Jeremiah said about his younger days (when he was being broken and trained to be a prophet):

“I thought all hope was gone. I can never forget those awful years. Yet there was one ray of hope. I knew the Lord’s compassion never ends. The Lord alone was my inheritance in those days and I hoped in Him alone - and I found His mercies to be new to me every morning. Now I can testify that the Lord is wonderfully good to those who wait for Him and that it is good to quietly wait for the Lord’s time of deliverance. It is good for a young man to be under discipline, for it causes him to sit in silence under the Lord’s Hand, with his face in the dust. Let him turn the other cheek to those who strike him and let him accept their awful insults. Then there will be some hope for him. The Lord will not abandon him. Although God gives grief, He shows compassion too.” (Lamentations 3:18-33 – adapted from the Living Bible).

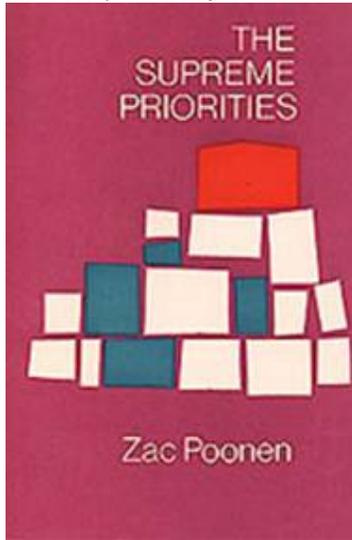
Hallelujah!!

CHAPTER 18

God Pushes Me Into A Writing Ministry

Towards the end of 1969, I had just finished writing my first manuscript (as described in my last article). But I never sent the manuscript to any publisher for I did not feel that any publisher would publish a book written by an unknown young man. So I kept it with me.

At that time, Angus Kinnear (who compiled Watchman Nee's books) "*happened*" to come to Vellore and I "*happened*" to meet him. I see now that God had sent him there at that very time, just for me. Since he was an experienced writer, I showed him my manuscript and asked him if he could read through it and give me some suggestions. He agreed to do so and took it with him to England. In a little while, I got a letter from him stating that he was happy with the manuscript and had got it typeset, got a cover designed for it and sent it on to GLS Bombay to be published. That book - "*THE SUPREME PRIORITIES*" - was published in 1970. Thus God nudged me into a writing ministry.



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The leaders of the Union of Evangelical Students of India saw this book and "*happened*" to ask me (in the same year) if I would write two more books – one on guidance and the other on sex and marriage – specifically designed for Indian students. I sought God earnestly for wisdom and He helped me to complete the initial manuscripts of both books within 3 months. I spent another 4 months correcting the manuscripts and retyping them on my old typewriter. Finally, one night in 1970, I finished typing the last of the 150 pages of both manuscripts.

I had never learnt typing, and so I had to do all my typing by looking at the keys (the "*seek and ye shall find*" method!!). Besides that, I could type with only one finger of each hand!! So my progress was very slow. I still remember that night when those two fingers of mine were thoroughly numb, after many months of typing! But I went to bed rejoicing that night, because God had given me grace and wisdom to complete the task He had assigned me. *FINDING GOD'S WILL* and *SEX, LOVE & MARRIAGE* were published by GLS in 1971.

In early 1971, it "*happened*" that I was invited to speak at the Evangelical Fellowship of India's annual conference at Vellore. I gave three messages there on *Elisha*. The Lord gave me an unusual anointing at that conference - and so I felt that I should share these messages with others immediately. God helped me to type out those messages too - and I titled the book "*NEEDED – MEN OF GOD*".

In mid-1971, I was invited to speak at the Keswick Convention in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamilnadu. I gave four messages there on "*The Christ-Life for the Self-Life*". Audio-taping of sermons was not common in those days. But in the sovereignty of God, someone "*happened*" to tape all four messages. Three months later, someone "*happened*" to come to me and offered to transcribe those messages from tape to paper. Once I got the transcript, I edited it and titled the book "*BEAUTY FOR ASHES*". If those messages had not been taped and transcribed by someone, that book would never have

been written - because I was now getting many more openings for ministry and I just did not have the time, as in the previous two years, to sit down and type any manuscripts.

In all these instances, I see the amazing sovereignty of God that brought the right people to me at the right time (without any effort on my part), to encourage me to write, to ask me to write on specific topics, and to tape and transcribe my messages. I also see the sovereignty of God that reduced my preaching ministry considerably during those three years – so that I would have plenty of time to write – and to type!!

Many authors nowadays spend thousands of rupees on computer equipment and on staying at expensive retreat centers for many months, in order to write just one book! I had nothing but an old typewriter with me. And I lived with my wife and my small son in one small room and did all my work in that room from 1969 to 1971.

I had no ability to write and I certainly had no desire to be known as an author. But God had given me a love for young people and a burden to reach them with the truth. And so He pushed me into a writing ministry when I was 30 years old – and I wrote five books in a period of less than 3 years. I know that it was God Who did it. And I know He did it because He loved the young people of India and wanted them to know the truth about Him and about His Word.

I have discovered that writing Christian books does not require money, or convenient surroundings, or even any special natural ability. Peter and John were poor fishermen, not writers. And Paul wrote while he was in a prison. But all of them sought the glory of God alone in their lives and God anointed them with the Holy Spirit. And they wrote from what they had experienced in their lives – not empty theories. That was the secret. And that is why God has used their writings to bless millions of people all over the world during the past twenty centuries.

CHAPTER 19

A New Location And A House

After my books began to be circulated in 1971, I began to receive many invitations for ministry from all over India. Since it was not easy to travel from an out-of-the-way place like Vellore, my wife and I began praying about moving to some major city from which travel would be easier. We also wanted to be in a city where we could work among college-students. We considered Madras and Bangalore as two possibilities. As we prayed about this matter, considering various factors, we saw that there was plenty of student-ministry going on in Madras, but very little in Bangalore. So we began leaning towards moving to Bangalore. But we wanted some confirmation from the Lord before moving.

At that very time, a missionary (whom we knew well) who was pastoring a Baptist church in Bangalore, knowing nothing about our thinking, asked me if I would fill in for him in his church, while he went on vacation for three months. He told us that we could stay in his house during those 3 months, when he and his family were away. This seemed to be the confirmation that we had been seeking for. So I accepted his invitation. This would also give us three months to look for a house for ourselves.

So we moved to Bangalore in April 1972. We had no savings and very few earthly possessions at that time. All that we owned on earth fitted into one small van, with which we moved to Bangalore. I preached in the Baptist church there for three months. When the missionary returned, I handed the pulpit back to him.

This was the first step in God's plan – because those three months of ministry in Bangalore gave us contacts with a number of people who later formed the core of the church that the Lord planted three years later.

Annie and I had moved to Bangalore in order to work among college-students. But we ended up *never* working among students at all. The Lord planted a church instead. God's ways are mysterious. He does not show us the whole future, but only one step at a time. He even allows us at times, to imagine that we are going to a place in order to engage in some particular ministry, when all along what He has in mind for us there is something quite different! "*His ways are perfect – and He makes our ways perfect*" (Psa.18:30,32). Hallelujah!

God plans our future in far better ways than we can ever do. When we seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, He gives us all the earthly things we need for life in this world too. Christians tend to go to two extremes in this matter. Some imagine that God is interested in blessing us with earthly blessings *primarily*. Others imagine that God has *no interest* in our earthly needs at all. Both are wrong. God cares for us more than any earthly father cares for his child and He wants to provide our every need – spiritual first and earthly next.

God knew that housing would become very expensive in Bangalore in future years. I did not know that. So God made a provision to meet that need for me. My father was a retired pensioner without much money. But he did have a small ancestral house in Kerala, in which he had not stayed for 40 years. It had been leased out to a tenant. When my father tried to sell that house, the tenant caused difficulties. The Communist party that had been ruling Kerala for many years always supported the tenants. So my father gave up all hope of ever being able to sell his house. But God had a plan. A little later, the Communist party lost the elections and a new government came into power. However, in

a short time, this new government also fell and the Communists came back to power again. But during that short interval – when the Communists were *not* in power – God enabled my father to sell his house! He did not get much money for it. But he gave me my share from that.

With that amount, I bought an old house in Bangalore in 1972. When negotiating the purchase of this house, I told the owner (a respectable lady) that I had no “*black money*” to give her, but that the entire price of the house would be paid by cheque as “*white money*”. In India, almost everyone buys and sells houses with a large percentage of the price paid in “*black money*” (money kept as cash because it is unaccounted for). This lady had received more attractive offers than mine from her own relatives. But she told them, “Mr.Poonen is a righteous man and I will sell it only to him!” We owned no furniture. But we discovered amazingly that she was selling all her furniture also along with her house! And she sold us that too at a very reasonable price. We still use that very same furniture today. God’s care for our needs was so exact! Above all, this house became the birthplace of the church three years later – in 1975.

When I gave away all my earnings for God’s work and left the Navy to serve the Lord, I never thought I would ever own a house in my entire life. But God had plans that I knew nothing about. He even removed a government in Kerala so as to enable me to buy this house in Bangalore. It is wonderful to see the perfect timing of God in everything He does. As we seek to honour Him, He honours us. *Hallelujah!*



*16 DaCosta Square, Bangalore, India
- where we first started meeting as a church on 17 August 1975*

CHAPTER 20

Forsaking All Possessions

Jesus said that anyone who wanted to be His disciple must “*forsake all that he possesses*” (*Lk.14:33*). If we are serious about being His disciples, then God will bring us again and again to the place where we have to forsake all that the world considers valuable.

I had already made the decision to forsake honour, position and money, when I gave up my naval career. I was now faced with a new choice – concerning earthly property.

I had never expected to own a house in my entire life. But as I mentioned earlier, I now owned a house – albeit an old one. And I began to wonder whether I would become attached to this bit of earthly property. I never wanted anything to come between me and the Lord and I never wanted to be attached to anything on this earth at any time. I wanted to be like the overcomers mentioned in the book of *Revelation* who had been “*set free from the earth*” (*Rev.14:3 paraphrase*). So I prayed with all my heart that if this house was going to become an idol to me, the Lord would burn it down to the ground. It would be quite easy for the Lord to arrange an electrical short-circuit or some accidental fire to burn the house down, when none of us were inside it. I prayed this prayer many times – quite sincerely. And many a time, when returning to my house from somewhere, I fully expected to see my house in flames and my wife and son standing outside watching it.

I had placed this ‘*Isaac*’ on the altar and given it up to God (*Gen.22*). But God did *not* destroy my house. He allowed us to keep it – and we still *have* it today. But we don’t *possess* it. It has never been *our* house from the very first day. It has been the *Lord’s* house always – to be used for Him and for His people. We have lived in that house for more than 33 years now – and we praise the Lord that it has been the house of God and the gate of heaven for many people during all these years. Lost souls have found the Lord in this house, the sick have been healed, demon-possessed people have been delivered, and the church of the living God has been built there. From this house, books and tapes have gone out into many parts of the world and blessed many people. I now see that that was why God gave us this house. And that is the reason why God gives us many earthly things – that we might use them to bless others. Earthly things have their maximum value only when they are used to bless and help others – and not when they are used merely for ourselves and our families.

Some time after this, I bought a new scooter – since the old one I had from my Navy days had worn out. I was very careful with this new scooter (as we all are with anything new), and did not to allow any scratches to come on it. Within a few days of my purchasing it, I began to hear a rattling sound coming from it, whenever I rode it. I wondered what was wrong. I took it to a mechanic, and he checked it thoroughly and said that there was nothing wrong with the engine or with any other part of the scooter. I sought the Lord and He told me that I had not placed this new scooter on the altar and given it up to Him as yet. I realized then that I could unconsciously become attached even to a small thing like a scooter – especially if it was a new one! So I placed this also on the altar and gave it away to the Lord. It was *His* scooter from then on and He could do whatever He wanted with it. If He wanted me to lend it to one of His children at some time (or even to give it away), I would do so – because it was His. And if someone borrowed it from me and damaged it or lost it, I would not allow that to disturb me – for the scooter was the Lord’s. The rattling noise in the scooter stopped immediately.

I saw that God wanted me and my wife to be free from attachment to all earthly things – from big things like a house and from small things like a scooter; and from still smaller things like the electronic gadgets that we used in our home – and even from the clothes that we wore. *We were to possess nothing as our own.* At times, when a tape-recorder or a mixer in our home was spoiled or stopped working, we reminded ourselves that while we were to be careful in the use of all earthly things, we were never to love or possess any of them.

The Lord was jealous that our spirits should not be defiled by attachment to anything of this earth. This is a prime requirement for being a disciple and for building His church. The Lord wanted me and my wife to be His disciples – who while *having* earthly things in our house, would *possess none of them as our own.* Thus our life has been free from anxiety over earthly things and also from greediness and covetousness. We have found our joy in the Lord Himself – and in the Lord alone. Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 21

Hitting Rock Bottom

The period from mid 1971 to end 1974 (when I was 31 to 35 years old) was the period during which my fame grew rapidly in my *public ministry*. It was also the period during which I backslid the most in *my personal life*. Popularity and backsliding go together in the lives of many preachers.

My fame as a preacher, author and radio-speaker was spreading far and wide. I had written 6 books by then that were being widely circulated. Some of them had been translated into other Indian languages. Ken Taylor (translator of *The Living Bible*) had met me in 1971 and asked for permission to publish my book *Finding God's Will* through his publishing house in the USA. This was published through *Tyndale House* in 1972. My weekly radio programme was being broadcast across South East Asia. And I was being invited as the main speaker at many deeper life and 'Keswick' conferences in Singapore, United Kingdom, Australia and in many places in India. I remember one series of revival meetings at which I preached every day for 21 consecutive days. Many people repented of their sins and were drawn to the Lord. I was an ascending star in evangelical Christendom!

But during this entire period (*mid-1971 to end-1974*) I was backsliding *inwardly*. My *external* life before men was spotless throughout this period. I was also upright and honest in all my private financial matters and paid all my taxes honestly. But I was defeated inwardly in my thought-life and defeated in my home-life by anger etc., No-one who heard me on the radio or in pulpits across the world however knew this, for I was still preaching powerfully. *There was no decline in the exercise of my preaching gift during this entire period.*

In fact, when I visited Melbourne (Australia) in December 1973, to speak at the Keswick Convention, an Australian Christian newspaper proclaimed me as the finest Keswick preacher they had ever heard. Little did they know that I who preached the deeper life of victory over sin was defeated myself in my thought-life. I discovered then that even good believers can be deceived into considering a man to be spiritual if he has a powerful preaching gift. I have preserved a copy of that newspaper article to remind myself that *one can be the finest preacher and the greatest backslider at the same time.*

But through my backsliding, God taught me the following lessons:

1. The blessing of the Lord upon our labours, and the results that we see in our *ministry*, are *no indication* of God's approval of our *life*. Our spiritual state can be evaluated *only* by the purity of our inner life.

2. It is when our ministry is being blessed mightily by God that we are in greatest danger of *spiritual pride* – and pride is the primary cause of all backsliding.

3. God allows people to exercise their spiritual gifts powerfully, even when they are living in known sin, in order to test them to see whether they value *His approval* more or the honour of men.

4. The eloquence of gifted preachers and their so-called miracles do *not* impress me any more – for I believe what Jesus said, that many who prophesy and do miracles in His Name will be sent to hell finally, because they lived in sin in their private lives (*Matt.7:22,23*).

Knowing all this has been a great safeguard for me during the last 30 years.

By mid-1974, I became so tired of my hypocritical life that I decided to quit the ministry— because I did not want to go on living a double life and deceive people. So I began to seek the Lord in prayer. I told Him that if He wanted me to continue in His service, He must baptize me afresh in the Holy Spirit and make my inner life correspond with what I was preaching. For six months I prayed regularly along with another brother who was equally needy. And then in January 1975, God filled me with His Spirit again and turned my life around completely.

I know now that God does not give His Spirit to those who *deserve* Him, but to those who realize *their desperate need of Him*. I did not deserve the Holy Spirit then, *or now*. The Holy Spirit is a free gift – exactly like the forgiveness of sins. Since that day, more than 30 years ago, life for me has been totally different. It has proceeded from “*one degree of glory to another*”. God’s grace has been abundant to a wretched sinner like me, who deserved only hellfire. I thank God that Jesus came “*to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance*”.

I had to hit rock bottom and go into the depths of defeat and be thoroughly broken, before the Lord could accomplish what He wanted *in* me and *through* me.

Two results of this breaking have been:

(1) It is very difficult for me now to be puffed up (no matter what God does through me) or to imagine that I am a ‘*somebody*’.

(2) It is very difficult for me now to despise any sinner or backslider, however deeply he may have fallen.

Thus God prepared me for building His church six months later. Hallelujah!!

CHAPTER 22

A Fresh Enduement With Power

God allows many things in our lives to break us so that we are driven to cling to Him. By the end of 1974, God had broken me over a period of 15 years in many ways. Many elder brothers of churches had misunderstood me, had been jealous of my ministry and had suppressed me and rejected me. I had failed many a time in my personal life. In our home, Annie and I had gone through periods of extreme financial need. And to top it all, when I moved to Bangalore, I became sick.

I had always been a healthy young man. But as soon as I moved to Bangalore in 1972, I was severely afflicted by repeated attacks of asthma. This was so bad that I could not sleep at night but had to sit up in a chair most nights. I had to spray asthma-relieving medicines frequently into my mouth just to be able to breathe freely. People told me that Bangalore was the worst place for asthma-sufferers in India. Yet I knew that God had led Annie and me to move to Bangalore. So this was obviously an attack from Satan to make me move away from Bangalore – for some reason.

In mid-1974, I received an invitation to be the pastor of a Baptist Church in Bangalore. I told them that I would preach for them every Sunday morning and evening, on two conditions – (1) that I would not take the title of “*Pastor*”(because I hated all religious titles); and (2) that I would *not* receive a salary from the church (because I felt I would be able to preach the whole truth to them only if I was *not* receiving any money from them). They agreed to both conditions readily and I started preaching in that Baptist Church.

But I was in desperate spiritual need in my personal life. So I began to seek God earnestly in prayer along with another brother, who was also in desperate need. Yet nothing seemed to change for us, month after month.

In January 1975, a charismatic preacher from England came to Bangalore for some meetings. I had read his books and been greatly blessed by his balanced teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I attended his meetings and asked him if he would speak at our church the next Sunday morning. He readily agreed.

Before the Sunday morning service, the Lord asked me if I was willing to stand up before my congregation (that respected me so highly) and confess that I was a hypocrite. I said “Yes, Lord”. (We don’t have to confess our *private* sins publicly. But in my case, I was deceiving everyone by my hypocrisy.) I had reached rock-bottom in my life and I was willing to do anything and to pay any price, if only the Lord would meet with me.

This charismatic preacher always gave an invitation at the end of his meetings, for those who wanted prayer to come forward. So I planned to be the first one to go forward and confess my hypocrisy, that Sunday morning. But amazingly, that Sunday morning, he never gave an invitation. So I did not get a chance to make my public confession. I felt then that the Lord had seen my willingness to sacrifice my reputation - and that that was all He wanted. I had placed my “*Isaac*” on the altar and the Lord had returned it to me.

I invited the preacher home for lunch after the service. After lunch, we went together to an upper room in my house and I told him how desperately I needed God’s power. He told me, “It is unthinkable, Zac, that God will call you to His service and then refuse to give you His power”. As he said these words, faith was suddenly born in my heart – and I believed that God had answered my prayer for power. We knelt down to pray and he prayed for me. Then I prayed and thanked the Lord for answering my prayer. As I did so, I suddenly found myself uttering strange syllables that I had no intention to utter. I

switched back to praying in English and found myself again uttering some strange syllables that I could not understand. This puzzled me but joy filled my heart. We had prayed only for a few minutes. As I got up from prayer, I asked this brother what he had heard. He said he had heard me speaking in tongues! My wife told me later that when she saw me coming back from that time of prayer, she knew something wonderful had happened to me – by the light on my face. God had indeed met with me – and things have never been the same since.

It is not that I never made any mistakes or fell, after that day. Nor has it been a straight steady climb upwards since then. But I can say this that the general direction of my life was reversed that day – January 12, 1975. The graph of my life started going upwards and has been going upward ever since. 30 years have passed since that blessed day and life has never been the same for me. But if you look closely at this upward graph, you will find that it is not a straight line but a *wavy* line. There are little ups and downs along the way, but the graph moves steadily upwards. And the ripples on the line get less and less as I get closer to the Lord. I am not perfect, but I am pressing on. And as a wonderful by-product of this encounter with God, He healed me of my asthma and I have never had a problem with it since.

At last I discovered what “*new-covenant life in the Spirit*” really was – the life that Jesus purchased on the cross for His church and gave to her on the day of Pentecost.

Hallelujah!

CHAPTER 23

Filled With The Spirit And Thereafter

Both my wife Annie and I, were in a Brethren church from the time of our conversion. This made it difficult for us to accept the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues. I had already experienced something of the enduement of the Spirit (without “*tongues*”) in 1963; and I was open to receive the gift of tongues as well if God were to give it to me. So I used to listen to many tapes on the baptism in the Spirit. But Annie was strongly prejudiced against this doctrine and did not want me to listen to such tapes, fearing that I might become a Pentecostal.

However, she soon came to a place of desperate need herself. She had been very active as a young college-girl, witnessing for the Lord in her college and in the women’s jail etc., Now she was married to a fulltime worker who did not even have a clear understanding of his ministry. We did not have enough money to even rent a house and were living in one room of my parents’ home that they had given us to use. Our first son had just been born; and so Annie had a small baby to look after as well. We had to scrape all the money we had in order to buy milk-powder for our son each month. These pressures reduced Annie to a state of discouragement.

One day in late 1969, a sister whom she knew, asked her if she would like to come for a time of prayer to her home. Annie went with her. When she returned some time later, she was totally transformed. I could see that she was radiant. Something had happened to her. She told me how she had cried out to God many times in the past months, in her desperate need. Finally God had met with her that afternoon and filled her with the Holy Spirit and given her the gift of tongues as well. She was the one who had been totally opposed to this gift until then. But God had broken down her prejudices and met with her. From that moment she began to pray that I too would receive this gift. She never told me that she was praying for me and she never urged me to seek for this gift. All she did was pray for me in secret.

More than five years later, God answered her prayer and met with me too - on January 12, 1975. But the day after the Lord met with me, I began to doubt my experience. Had I really been filled with the Spirit? Had I really received a genuine gift of “*tongues*”, or had I just made up those syllables that I spoke?

I felt that if I had really been filled with the Holy Spirit, then one proof of it would be that the Bible (that the Holy Spirit had written) would come alive to me in a new way from now on. So I decided to read the New Testament all over again – and started with *Matthew Chapter 1*. I meditated on the genealogy of Christ with all its “*begats*” – and didn’t get any inspiration from them! But when I reached verse 20 I was struck by the words: “...*that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*”! I felt that God was speaking to me directly. That which had been conceived in my heart and which I had delivered through my mouth yesterday was from the Holy Spirit!! I was so delighted that I praised the Lord for this assurance.

The Lord then began to speak to me through this passage. First of all, even as Mary alone knew what the Holy Spirit had done in her and most others misunderstood her, even so, I alone knew what the Holy Spirit had done in me; but most others would misunderstand me. Secondly, as the Spirit came upon Mary to produce Jesus in her, even so the Spirit had come upon me primarily to produce Christ in me. The Lord told me that the gift of tongues had been much misunderstood and evil spoken of in the world; and I

was now to adorn this gift with a Christlike life so that people would once again have faith in it. This is what I have sought to during the last 30 years.

From that moment, it was as if all hell broke loose around me in India. Word spread like wildfire throughout the churches that "*Zac Poonen was speaking in tongues*". Today the gift of tongues has become more respectable in Christendom in India, and opposition to it has died down, because thousands of believers have received this gift. But in 1975 in India, things were different. People began to spread false stories about me that I was pulling people's tongues to make them speak in tongues!! Satan had a field-day with his gossiping co-workers in Christendom!! But I was unfazed. I had not even expected to speak in tongues and was surprised when God gave me the gift. And as He had warned me, most others would misunderstand me.

I now began to teach the Biblical basis for the baptism in the Spirit in the Baptist church in which I was preaching. Week after week I taught on it and a few who were conscious of their powerlessness became hungry for this in their lives. We began weekly prayer meetings for these few. Three months later a godly charismatic preacher came to Bangalore, and I asked him to speak at our Baptist church. At his meetings, a number in the church were led into the baptism in the Spirit. And then the Baptists were really disturbed.....

Satan was furious, but God was sovereignly working out His purposes and silently planning for me in love.

CHAPTER 24

The End of A Phase And The Beginning Of Another

There would have been no Christianity on earth today if it were not for the mighty baptism in the Spirit that the apostles received on the day of Pentecost, that transformed them into flaming witnesses for Christ who took the gospel everywhere. It is not surprising therefore that Satan has made the baptism of the Holy Spirit *the most controversial doctrine* and *the most counterfeited experience* in Christendom today.

As I preached the baptism in the Spirit in the Baptist church during the first six months of 1975, many people in that church were disturbed, because this did not agree with “*their church traditions*”. Conflict with *tradition* was something that Jesus and His apostles had also encountered wherever they preached (*Mark 7:13*).

In July 1975, I was invited to England for some meetings. While I was there, early one morning, the Lord spoke to me in the clearest way that I had ever heard Him speak to me in my entire life. I did not understand the significance then, of all that He told me. But looking back now after 30 years, I can see that the Lord was encouraging me and preparing me for the beginning of a new phase in my life and ministry. I did not have a clue however that I would be catapulted into that phase as soon as I returned to Bangalore. How wonderfully the Lord encourages us in advance when he sees that we are going to face rough waters in the future.

On my return home, I discovered that a lot of murmuring had been going on in the Baptist Church concerning my preaching. God is not the author of confusion but of peace - and so I sought the way of peace. I called the deacons of the church together and told them that I had no desire to cause confusion or to split their church over the issue of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If they wanted me to leave, I told them that I would leave quietly. They said they wanted me to leave *immediately*. I asked if I could give a farewell message to the church the next Sunday. They said, “No”. The next day, however, they relented and agreed to let me speak.

And so I preached my farewell message to that congregation on Sunday, August 17, 1975. I told them that they were facing a crucial decision, just like the Israelites at the borders of the promised land. They could either go forward into a life in the Holy Spirit, or continue to wander in the wilderness of religious traditions. As soon as I had finished my message, the brother who was the Assistant Pastor in that church got up and said that since the church had rejected my message, he had decided to resign his position and leave the church too.

A visiting godly brother (who had preached in that church four months earlier) had *prophesied* in his message that if the church rejected what I was teaching about the Holy Spirit’s ministry, then the Lord would remove me from their midst and use me throughout India in a mighty way, apart from them.

That was the end of a phase of my life and ministry. The Lord had planned something new for me thereafter, but at that time I was confused and did not know what lay ahead. But I was then at the threshold of what the Lord had been training me for, all along – making disciples and building the Body of Christ. And that ministry would lead to intense opposition and persecution – such as I had never experienced in all my life – from almost every group of believers in Christendom. God does not allow us to be tested beyond our ability. So He did not allow me to face such opposition until then. I needed 16 years of preparation to face it.

On that Sunday, after the two of us left that Baptist church, we did not know what to do next. So we decided to meet for prayer in my home that evening. We certainly had no plan to start a new church. When we finished praying, we agreed to meet again during the week for more prayer and fellowship. I spent the next three days in fasting and prayer seeking the Lord for direction for the future. A couple of families joined us the next Sunday and we started meeting four times a week and spent many hours in fasting and prayer (on all public holidays). As we look back now, we see that a “baby” was being conceived in those times of fasting and prayer. It was the beginning of a “body” – a local expression of the Body of Christ.

At that time, an elderly American pastor of a Pentecostal church who was retiring and returning home, came and asked me if I would take over from him as Pastor of his church. I immediately said, “No”, for I knew that God did not want me to join a denominational church again. It was a new wineskin that God now wanted in Bangalore.

And so we moved forward – one day at a time – led by the Spirit, as the pillar of cloud led the Israelites in the wilderness. It was an exciting time – of making mistakes and learning from our mistakes. We did not know, for example, how to exercise the gifts of the Spirit. *Fortunately*, none of us had a Pentecostal background. So we got all our teaching *from Scripture alone*. We learnt through trial and error about prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation and healing etc., The numbers at our meetings began to increase slowly to 20 and then 30. Some who came were sincere while others came only to receive financial help. We did not have much discernment in those days and were cheated a number of times. But we learnt lessons from our mistakes.

All of us were far from perfect. But we were determined to press on to perfection. That was the next phase.....

PART 2

Building the Body of Christ

CHAPTER 25

Money And God's Work

When considering the building of the Body of Christ, why should we start with a chapter on money??

Because money is the greatest alternate master to God in this world and Jesus said that that no-one could serve both God and Money (*Luke 16:13*). *Grace* is the greatest power in God's kingdom and *money* is the greatest power in this world.

So I realized, that if I am to build the Body of Christ, it was vital that I be free from the love of money and that my methods of obtaining money for my personal needs and for my ministry be godly. Many Christian workers have not thought through this issue – and so they end up in all sorts of compromises.

When I started serving the Lord full-time, I took two decisions in relation to money:

(1) That I would *never* make my financial needs known to anyone but my heavenly Father.

(2) That I would live very simply so that my needs would be minimal.

By God's grace I have been able to maintain both those decisions until today.

Most of my ministry in the early days was to poor people in village churches – and I refused to receive any gifts from them, because their standard of living was much lower than mine. Some others however (who were richer than me) would occasionally give me gifts, and I received enough for my expenses each month, as long as I was single. But once I was married and had a child, I found that what I received was not enough for my needs.

How could I meet my family's financial needs now? I did not want to be the salaried employee of any Christian organization, lest I become their slave. And of course, I would *certainly not* send out circular letters hinting about my needs. I would also *not* visit rich churches, merely to get gifts from them. The well-known preachers in India preached only in the large cities. The great need for in-depth ministry was therefore among the poor people in the villages of India. So I asked the Lord to send me to those villages – and He did just that.

However, since I had to provide for my family, I found myself frequently thinking about money. I knew that those who are called to serve the Lord full-time should *not* be thinking about money frequently – just as a person called to be single, should *not* be occupied with thoughts of sex. One whose mind burns with sexual thoughts is obviously *not* called to a single life; and one whose mind is always on his financial needs, should *not* be in full-time ministry. So, in January 1970, I decided before the Lord to wait for another *six* months. If by the end of that time, my mind was not freed from preoccupation with my financial needs, that would prove to me that I did not have grace to continue in full-time work. I would then take up a secular job, and serve the Lord in my spare time.

One week before that 6-month deadline expired (in end-June 1970), a Christian group sent me a letter stating that they wanted to support me with a fixed amount that would be enough for my family's needs. On my part I would have to give them all the gifts I received for my ministry. I could choose whatever ministry I wanted and go wherever I felt led to go – and they would not control me in any way. I was amazed at their offer, because I did not know of any organization in the world that supported Christian workers without controlling them. Those who gave money always pulled the strings! I saw then

that this was the Lord's way of confirming to me that He had indeed called me to full-time ministry.

Once we started our house-church however, I felt I should stop receiving this financial support, in order to be an example to others in India. The Lord then led me to support myself as the apostle Paul did. God provided for Paul's needs mostly through his own occupation as a tentmaker, and partly through gifts from the Philippian believers. God now changed the mode of my financial support as well – and He did it in such an amazing way that my original desire was still fulfilled: ***My mind would NEVER be on money.***

I was 35 years old when we started our house-church. All I knew was how to navigate ships and how to fire guns and torpedoes – none of which was of any use in getting a job in Bangalore!! I did not have much skill in working with my hands either. I also needed to find a means of earning an income that would ***not*** tie me down to Bangalore, for I had a burden to spread the good news to many other places in India. ***I was the Lord's servant first and foremost.*** The apostle Paul's example challenged me in this area. Although he supported himself fully with a secular occupation in Corinth, Thessalonica and Ephesus for many years, he never allowed his secular occupation to become primary. He was an apostle first of all and he always made the Lord's work His top priority.

I decided to invest the little money that I had (that I had received as an inheritance from my parents), in companies that would give me a good return for my investment. I did not speculate in the stock market, for then my mind would always be on the market-value of my shares and not on God's work. I decided instead to invest directly in companies, ***without*** going through the stock-market. Amazingly, the Lord made the government of India also to help me at that time by their passing certain laws that enabled me to invest directly in a number of good multinational companies. I knew nothing about investing then, just as I knew nothing about preaching or writing, when I started doing those things. But God saw that my desire was not to make money, but only to earn enough for my family's needs. I had *very little* money to invest. But God took my five loaves and blessed them miraculously, so that I have been able to support my family for more than 30 years now, with that. By God's grace, our family's "*bowl of flour and jar of oil*" have always remained full (*1Ki.17:16*).

I had always wanted to be a living demonstration to my generation that there was a loving Father in heaven Who cared for His children. And God has enabled me to be such a testimony for Him. All glory and praise be to Him alone. Amen.

CHAPTER 26

When People Speak Evil Of You

When I left the Indian Navy to serve the Lord fulltime in May 1966, the one person who encouraged me the most and advised me was Brother Bakht Singh. He was India's most outstanding evangelist at that time and I respected him more than anyone else I knew, as a genuine man of God. He gave me three bits of Scriptural advice that have proved to be extremely valuable to me during the last 40 years. They were:

1. Never make your needs known to any man.
2. Live simply and don't spend much on your personal needs.
3. If people criticize you or speak evil of you, don't defend yourself.

In the last chapter, I mentioned how the Lord had helped me all these years to keep *the first two* of those bits of advice. The need for the third bit of advice became more evident after 1975-1976.

In the years 1975 and 1976, *three things* happened that suddenly changed the attitude of many Christians in India towards me. They became very negative towards me thereafter.

1. The Lord filled me afresh with the Holy Spirit and gave me the gift of *tongues*. (Some Christian groups still believe that "*speaking in tongues*" today comes only from demons!!).

2. The Lord started a new church in my home. (This is a very unpopular thing to do in a day such as ours, of interdenominationalism and ecumenism).

3. The Holy Spirit gave me revelation on the humanity of Christ – especially on the truth that Jesus "*was tempted in all points as we are and yet did not sin*" (*Heb.4:15*). I saw this as "*the secret of living a godly life*" (*1Tim.3:16*) and began to preach this glorious truth everywhere. (Biblical truths that have not been preached for centuries sound like heresy when someone finds them and preaches them again).

But these were the very three things that made me a joyful, rejoicing Christian who began to experience victory over sin in my personal life and in my family life. And for the first time in my life I had begun to experience fellowship in a local church that was a foretaste of heaven. But all of this infuriated Satan.

Whenever the blessing of the Lord increases in our life, Satan's fury against us increases too. The Lord allows this, because it is only through such attacks of Satan that the Lord keeps us humble, draws us closer to Himself, leads us into spiritual warfare thus strengthening us, and makes us a blessing to thousands. Like the rock that was smitten, we too need to be broken, before the rivers of blessing can flow out through us to others. The opposition of men and their false accusations serve to keep us broken before God. Thus the grain of wheat falls into the ground, loses its attractiveness before men, and dies. Then fruit comes forth from it in abundance.

Satan was quite happy with me as long as I was a famous, but defeated preacher, hypocritically preaching about the "*deeper-life*". But once I entered into the new-covenant life and started building new-covenant churches, and began to support myself financially, Satan became furious and stirred up Christian pastors and leaders all over the country against me – people who were either jealous of my ministry, or whose hypocrisy, honour-seeking and love of money were being exposed by my preaching. They began to

portray me as “*a false prophet*” who was teaching errors like “*sinless perfection*”, “*Christ had sin in His flesh*”, etc., and other heresies. None of these accusations were true and none of my accusers could show any evidence of my having taught these, in any of my books or tapes. But that did not bother them. I discovered that many Christian leaders hold hands with “*Satan, the Accuser of the brothers*”, and spread stories about God’s children, without any evidence at all. Many Christian magazines and publishers also have no more ethics than secular tabloids – for they too jump on to the “*Accusation bandwagon*” often and publish “*hearsay*” without verification.

It was now that I needed *the third bit of advice*. I had to learn to keep my mouth shut and to follow the Lord Who was silent as a lamb when He was accused falsely. And the Lord helped me. He has now helped me in this matter for over 30 years. I have refused to defend myself before any of my accusers. The Lord would often ask me, when I was being mercilessly attacked by false accusations, whether I wanted to justify myself before my accusers or *whether I would allow Him to deal with them*. I always told Him that I would let Him deal with them. Such accusations have not stopped even after 30 years. But when God is with us, we can face the whole world being against us. God has given me grace to love and forgive **all** my accusers and I have never lifted one finger to repay evil for evil or to hurt anyone who has tried to harm me.

Vengeance is God’s business and not mine. “*Vengeance is Mine and I WILL repay*’, says *the Lord*” is a new-covenant statement (*Rom.12:19*) – and God is very exact in making such “*repayments*”!!

Actually no-one has ever succeeded in harming me. I am “*the apple of God’s eye*” (*Zech.2:8*), and I have experienced the fulfilment of *Romans 8:28* in all the attacks I have faced. They have worked together for the glory of God and for my own good.

Here is but one example: Some who were warned against me, read my books and listened to my tapes, in order to find out what exactly the wrong doctrine was that I was preaching. As a result, ***they were gripped by the truth – and joined our churches and are glorious brothers and sisters in our midst today!!***

Thus God has turned the tables on Satan again and again.

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 27

Preparation For Building The Church

Ever since the year 1965, I had a great burden in my heart to see a local church in India where discipleship, holy living and separation from the world were emphasized, and where the brothers and sisters were identified as Jesus disciples' by their love for one another (as Jesus said in *Jn.13:35*) - and not by the fundamentalism of their doctrines. I now see that God planned to build such a church, when He moved us to Bangalore. But before that church could be built, the Lord had to test me in *two* important areas.

Two of the biggest sins among preachers in Christendom today are:

1. Making *financial profit* through one's spiritual gift and ministry. (No-one can be a servant of God if he loves money – See *Luke 16:13*).

2. Seeking for *fame and honour* through one's spiritual gift and ministry. (No-one can be a servant of Christ if he seeks to please man or impress man – See *Galatians 1:10*).

Failure in these two areas is the main reason why many gifted preachers fail to become God's "*prophets*" and genuine "*servants of the Lord*" in our land.

These were two areas in which the Lord had to test me before He could commit His work to me.

I have already spoken (in an earlier Chapter) of the Lord's testing me in the *first* of these areas and how the Lord led me to support myself in order to be an example to other Christian workers (as Paul was) – in India.

In relation to the *second* area: The Lord asked me *twice* in my life, to give up fame and honour.

The *first* time was in 1964, when I was advancing rapidly in my Naval career. I was doing exceptionally well in my career when the Lord asked me to quit the Navy and serve Him full-time.

The *second* time was in 1975, when I was becoming more and more famous in Christian circles as an author and radio-preacher and as a speaker at deeper life conventions in many countries worldwide.

My father had been the Chairman of the first "*Billy Graham Crusade*" in India (in Delhi in 1956) and he used to tell me that I too had a preaching gift like Billy Graham and that God could use me all over the world.

The Lord however told me in 1975 not to seek for a world-wide ministry but instead to just fall into the ground each day and die. He showed me that the secret of a fruitful ministry did not lie in a spiritual gift or a worldwide ministry, but in dying as a grain of wheat – as He Himself had done in His earthly days (*Jn.12:24*).

God wanted me to turn away from the pursuit of fame in the *secular world* as well as in the *Christian world*. Only then would He attest me as His servant. By God's grace, I yielded to His call in *BOTH* "*worlds*".

The Lord also assured me that He would give me His power and anointing constantly if I *consistently* chose the way of the cross. This meant dying to my own choices, dying to men's opinions about me (whether good or bad), ignoring the criticisms of my enemies and loving them in return, dying to earthly comforts and conveniences, dying to personal choices as to where to go and where to preach, dying to my own cleverness and depending on the Lord alone for revelation and guidance in all matters, dying to my

personal attachment to people (which could make me compromise or show partiality to my family members or coworkers), etc., In other words, He was calling me to die to Self and accept the rule of God in every area of my life.

The Lord also showed me that there were *two sides* to the great commission – one was *preaching the gospel* to ALL men (as commanded in *Mark 16:15 ff*) and the other was *making disciples* and teaching them to obey ALL that Jesus commanded (as commanded in *Matt.28:18-20*) – and the Lord showed me that it was the *second side* of this great commission that had been neglected almost everywhere in India, and that needed to be emphasized.

And so I chose in 1975, to give up an itinerant worldwide teaching ministry and to start on the less exciting ministry of making disciples and building them into local churches. After 30 years of doing this *latter* ministry, I can say that, although this is a more demanding ministry, it is far more satisfying. It produces more lasting results – for eternity. It is easy to be a spiritual *consultant* travelling around the world giving advice to people. It is more difficult to be a spiritual *father* working patiently with disciples and bringing them to maturity. But at the end of the road, it is far more rewarding to be a spiritual father than to be a spiritual consultant!

I have no regret today that I chose the way of the cross instead of worldwide fame as a preacher!

CHAPTER 28

Some Distinctives Of The New Church

When we started meeting together in my home in August 1975, we had absolutely no intention of starting a new church. Only *apostles* planted churches – and I certainly did not feel that I qualified! But as time went on, we found more and more people coming to meet with us and we had no option but to continue meeting together. We never invited anyone to join us. And we did not want anyone to join us merely because he was fed up with his own church – because we knew that such a person would soon get fed up with *us too!* Jesus invited only the “*weary and heavy laden*” to come to Him (*Matt.11:28*) – in other words, those who were fed up with their own *defeated lives and who were desperately seeking for victory*. We wanted only such folks to join us.

There were already hundreds of denominations in India and we were certain that God did not want to start another denomination through us. Ever since the Protestant reformation, every new movement that the Lord started was started by Him to emphasize some features of the new-covenant life that the existing churches around them were *not* emphasizing. Otherwise there would be no need for God to start something new.

Now the Lord was starting a new church in our midst. We wondered what the distinctives were that He wanted to emphasize through us. We were certainly *not* more spiritual than others. We were all sinners saved by grace and we were aware of our own imperfections in many areas. But we could *not* agree with many other churches in a number of areas, where we felt they had departed from New Testament teaching and practice. As we continued to meet, some of the areas where we disagreed began to crystallize in our minds:

1. *Water-baptism*: We practiced water baptism by immersion for believers in the Name of the Trinity. So we were different from all the mainline denominations that practised infant baptism.

2. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*: We believed in the baptism in the Holy Spirit and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So we differed from the Brethren and the Baptists!! But then we did *NOT* believe that speaking in tongues was the evidence of the baptism of the Spirit, but rather the receiving of God’s power (See *Acts 1:8* and *10:38*). So we differed from the Pentecostals and the charismatics!!

3. *Discipleship*: We saw that our Lord had commanded us *to make disciples* (*Matt.28:19*), who fulfilled the conditions of discipleship He had laid down in *Luke 14:26,27* and *33*. So we disagreed with most other churches – that emphasized only evangelism and *not* discipleship.

4. *Pastors*: We saw that a “*pastor*” was a *gift* (*Eph.4:11*) and not an *office* in the church. The New Testament clearly taught that churches were to be led by “*elders*” and not by a pastor (*Tit.1:5*). And there had to be at least *two* elders in every church – to avoid the dangers of one-man rule and to bring a balance in the leadership. This conviction set us apart from almost all churches.

5. *Money*: Money has such great power, that Jesus referred to it as an alternative master to God (*Lk.16:13*)! We saw that we needed a clear testimony in this area, because much of Christian work in India had a bad reputation, due to ungodly financial practices. Preachers and pastors begged for money through their reports and their prayer-letters. Jesus and His apostles had never given reports of their work to anyone (except their fellow-workers); and they never asked anyone for financial support for themselves or for

their ministry. Instead, they trusted their heavenly Father to move men to give them the money necessary for their work. We could trust our Father in the same way too. So we decided never to give reports of our work to anyone (except our own church family) and never to ask anyone for money. We also decided that we would never take an offering in any of our church services but only keep a box for voluntary offerings – since the Lord had said that all offerings must be given secretly (*Mt.6:1-4*). So our financial policy differed *fundamentally* from that of *almost every other church* in India.

6. *Self-support*: Most Christian workers in India saw Christian work as a means of earning a living and not as a *calling from God*. Many of them joined Western Christian organizations for a salary. *Christian work was a business for them, through which they made large profits!* The apostle Paul however worked with his own hands and supported himself in order to make himself distinct from such preachers in his day (*2Cor.11:12*). There is certainly nothing wrong in full-time elders being supported by the believers in their church. But because of the situation in India, we felt that we elders should be self-supporting – in order to be distinct from these other workers, just as Paul was in his day. In this area too, we found that our views differed from that of almost all the other churches in India.

7. *Dependence on the West*. Many churches in India were heavily dependent on Western Christians - both for ministry and for money. We saw this as a hindrance to our testimony to the non-Christians in India. We saw that many Indian preachers blindly imitated American methods and unquestioningly accepted American theology. So we decided not to be connected with any foreign organization and not to be *dependent* on any foreign source, either for money or for ministry. We wanted our ministry to be truly Indian, with Indian leadership – while at the same time being open to receive believers of all lands. In this area also we differed from most churches in India.

These were the reasons why God was starting a new church in India. We could see that God needed such a testimony in our land. So we submitted to God and allowed Him to do as He willed with us.

Every church has wonderful principles *when they start*. But *time* tests all those principles. How are things a few decades later? As we look back now after 32 years, although we still see our lack in many other areas, we thank God that He has preserved us without any compromise in the above *seven* areas.

All glory be to his Name alone!

CHAPTER 29

Authority Over Satan

Jesus told the Pharisees, “*If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Matt.12:28).

Jesus casting out demons through the Holy Spirit’s power was proof that the kingdom of God had come there and then. Peter also said, “*Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and delivered people who were oppressed by the devil*” (Acts 10:38). Jesus had lived a perfectly holy life for 30 years in Nazareth. But it was only after he was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism that He came into direct conflict with Satan (Matt.4:1-10) and delivered people from demons.

As a new church in Bangalore, we saw that the Lord’s calling for us was to be a miniature model of the *kingdom of God*. And this would bring us into direct conflict with the *kingdom of Satan*. As Christ’s Body on earth, we were called to exercise the same authority that Jesus our Head had exercised. And we could do that, only as he Himself did it – through the Holy Spirit. None of us in our church had any experience thus far, in binding Satan’s activities in prayer or in casting out demons. Demon-possessed people could not be helped by *counseling* or by *exhortations* to repent. They needed *deliverance* from the evil spirits that possessed them!!

All around us is a spirit-world that our human senses cannot sense. We can only observe the *manifestations* of these spirits. Before I was anointed with the Holy Spirit, I did not know what to do if I encountered a demon-possessed person. But the baptism in the Holy Spirit brought me into an awareness of this *spirit-realm*.

All human beings are afraid of Satan. One of the first things the Lord began to show me was that Satan had been defeated and stripped of all his armour on the cross (Col.2:15; Heb.2:14). So Satan could not touch a child of God in any way now, except where God permitted him to do so, for that person’s sanctification. The Lord showed me also that He had given His children “*authority over ALL the power of the enemy*” (Lk.10:19).

To embolden me against Satan, the Lord began to give me dreams at night, of encounters with Satan. We read in Acts 2:17 that God speaks to us *occasionally* through dreams: “*God said, ‘I will pour out my Holy Spirit upon all mankind..... and your young men shall see **visions**, and your old men will dream **dreams**’*”. The New Testament itself begins with five incidents (in its first two chapters) where God guided people through dreams (Matthew Chapters 1 & 2). Every dream we have is not from God. Many dreams are meaningless; and some dreams are just the result of having eaten too much the previous evening!! But occasionally a dream can be from God. We can know it is from God, if it encourages us and lifts up our spirits.

In one dream, I saw myself walking back to my room alone, after preaching my heart out at a public meeting one night. I heard a voice behind me saying, “That was not good enough. You could have preached better than that.” I thought I had done my best that night - but perhaps the Lord was still not satisfied - and I was discouraged when I heard that word. Then I asked the Lord (in my dream), “Why is it Lord, that when You speak to me face to face, I am always encouraged. But whenever you speak to me from behind me, it is always so discouraging?” The Lord said, “Turn around and see who is speaking to you.” I turned around and saw that it was the devil who had been speaking. As soon as I recognized him, he fled and disappeared.

I woke up from my sleep and learnt something that day – that the Lord never says, “*That was **not** good enough*” – to anyone. He never said it to anyone when He was on earth and He does not say it to anyone now that He is in heaven. Such a word *always* comes from Satan, who tells us we haven’t done well enough, only in order to *discourage* us. The Lord, on the other hand, *always appreciates* our weakest efforts. But we imagine that words that challenge us to improve could come *only* from the Lord and *never* from Satan. And then we get discouraged, because we feel that the Lord will never be satisfied, no matter how hard we try. This is one of Satan’s many lies. He is a master at pretending to speak as an angel of light (2 Cor.11:14)!

The Lord told me to expose this tactic of Satan in my preaching everywhere. And that is what I have done ever since. Most believers who know that Christ died for their sins on the cross, do not know that Satan was also totally defeated on the same cross. That is why they are afraid of Satan and therefore often depressed.

All *discouragement and self-condemnation* come only from Satan. Our heavenly Father will never tell us anything that discourages us. He is “*the God Who gives encouragement*” (Rom.15:5) and the “*One Who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials*” (2 Cor.1:3,4-Living).

I had been a slave to depression for many years. But the revelation of Christ’s victory and *our authority* over Satan, coupled with being filled with the Holy Spirit, delivered me from all depression and discouragement – *totally and permanently*.

Jesus is “*the Author and Perfecter of our faith*” (Heb.12:2). He was *never* discouraged or depressed. Because He defeated Satan, we too can now walk on earth as He walked then – free from *all* discouragement and depression (1 Jn.1:7).

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 30

Influencing The Government

The church of Jesus Christ is God's ambassador in each country. And so we are called to pray for government rulers and for all in authority, so "*that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God*" (1Tim.2:1). When we started meeting as a church in my house, we saw this as one of our main responsibilities as a new-covenant church. God had placed us in India to influence the government of our country and of our city, *for good*, through our prayers.

We knew that God was not looking for a great crowd of people to pray but only *a few* ("*two or three*"), *who had a pure conscience and who were united* (Psa.66:18; Matt.18:18-20). We were only a few in number in our church, but we did seek after holiness earnestly and we were united.

God used us on a number of occasions to influence the affairs of our country and of our city.

First instance: One night, when I was in North India, I woke up suddenly from my sleep at 2 am and saw a vision. This was perhaps the only vision I have ever seen in my life. (It is difficult at times, at night to distinguish between a vision and a dream). In the vision, I saw the face of a very senior cabinet minister in the Indian government. I then saw the faces of a number of Indian people from various parts of the country; and I heard a voice that said, "*The power to free these people is in the church*".

I did not know what the vision meant but I knew it was from the Lord. So I began to pray in *unknown tongues*. When I returned to Bangalore, I shared this vision with the believers in our house-church and they joined me in prayer. Since I did not know what I was to pray for, I continued to pray in *tongues*. Ten days later, this particular minister had a conflict with others in the party and resigned from the parliamentary party. Two months later he resigned from the cabinet itself. This led to two factions emerging within the ruling party – one supporting the prime minister and the other supporting this man who had resigned. In the months thereafter, many efforts were made to bring these two factions together. Every time I read about such efforts in the paper, a burden would come on me to pray. I did *not* belong to any political party. So I could pray from a neutral standpoint without any bias towards anyone. And since I was praying in *tongues*, I did not know what I was praying for, but I knew it was in accordance with God's will – whatever that was!

About eight months later, an anti-Christian bill was introduced by a member of the ruling party, in India's parliament. But by then the ruling party was so divided into these two factions that they could not unite to pass the bill and make it a law (to harass Christians). The party itself lost power finally and split into two. It was only then I understood why God had given me this burden of prayer: *It was to prevent this bill from becoming law*. We are God's co-workers and He works in answer to our prayers. A few states in India have now passed such a law forbidding conversions, *for their states alone*. But this has *never been passed as a law for the whole country* – and so Christians still have freedom in most places in India, to preach the gospel freely.

Second instance: One evening, during a church prayer-meeting, I found myself having a sudden burden to pray for the country and for the government, so that we might live in peace and rest in our land. India was passing through a difficult time, with rumours of

corruption at the highest levels of government. I shared my burden with the church at the prayer-meeting, and we prayed for the country with much burden. Within 24 hours, there was a dramatic turn of events in the country. God removed someone from power who was the root-cause of the problems. And as a result, the political climate of the country changed totally – for the better. This was a very quick and specific answer to prayer.

Third instance: In 1981, the workers of all the public sector companies in Bangalore went on strike for over two months. Some began to indulge in violence too. Matters reached a flash point when the police fired at a crowd of striking workers one day. Bangalore was now a powder-keg of explosives ready to blow up. The police could round up the gangsters and the hooligans who were causing the problems. But they could not restrain the evil spirits who were instigating these people. That was the job of the church. So we called our church to three days of prayer for peace in our city. At the end of the third day, we felt that God had answered our prayer. A confirmation of this answer came later from the security staff of one of the companies, who told one of our church-members that all the security staff in that company had been under great suspense wondering what would happen next – when suddenly on a particular date the situation changed and the tension eased. The date he mentioned was the last day of our prayer meetings!! Very soon the strike too was called off and peace returned to our city. God used our small church to bring peace to millions of people in Bangalore.

Besides these instances, we have also influenced the elections in our country dramatically, more than once. We knew that the Christians in India were too few in number to influence any election results by their voting. But we also knew that we could influence the decision of the whole electorate in India by prayer. So we decided to vote for “*God’s perfect will*” in prayer meetings!! As we prayed, God could move people’s thinking in the direction that He wanted. So we have prayed as a church, for our country, at each election time. We have also prayed against anti-Christian governments whenever they have come to power in India or in our own state. And we have seen again and again, how God has answered our prayers in amazing ways. (We were not the only church that was praying. There were others too. God answered all our prayers).

We were encouraged through these instances to see that God was making us the salt and light of India – salt that gave a taste to its surroundings and a light that shone brightly for the Lord in the land.

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 31 Casting Out Demons

“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.....These signs will accompany those who have believed: In My name they will cast out demons.....’” (Mark 16:15-17).

Men and women have been possessed by demons from the beginning of human history. But we read of people being delivered from demons only after Jesus came. Now that Christ has defeated Satan on the cross, anyone can be *totally* delivered from demons in Jesus’ Name - just like anyone can have his sins *totally* forgiven in Jesus’ Name. Jesus wanted His disciples to proclaim this *dual* good news all over the world - that people could be delivered from *the guilt of their sins* as well as from *demons*. However, I never had faith to deliver people from demons until I was baptized in the Holy Spirit and was convinced that Jesus had defeated Satan on the cross.

One of my first encounters with an evil spirit, interestingly enough, was when I was speaking to students at a Bible-College. (Jesus cast out demons during synagogue-meetings!) I had experienced a great anointing in speaking that morning and had just concluded my message and asked everyone to bow in prayer. Suddenly one of the students in the last row of the hall got up and started dancing in the aisle. I realized immediately that this was a demon trying to distract the students from responding to the message. Since everyone was bowed in prayer, I knew that any loud rebuke of the demon would make the students lift their heads and look around and be distracted. So I whispered under my breath (so softly that even those sitting immediately behind me on the platform did not hear), *“In Jesus’ Name, sit down.”* Immediately the young man (who was nearly 40 feet away from me) sat down. I then continued with my closing prayer. I left the Bible-college after the meeting and never discovered who that student was. Some months later, I got a letter from another country. The person wrote saying that he had been possessed by a demon while in a temple some years earlier, and had then become a Christian and joined the Bible-college (at which I had spoken). He identified himself as the student who had stood up at that meeting and then wrote, *“I sat down when you told me to sit down”!* I was amazed to read that sentence – because his ears certainly did *not* hear my whisper that day, for he was too far away. But the demon within him had heard my words – and obeyed.

The Lord taught me two lessons that day about demons. *First of all*, that demons have very good *hearing* and so we don’t have to shout at them (like many people do) when casting them out! *Secondly*, that if our life is clean and we have faith in Christ’s victory over Satan at the cross, we need command the demons *just once* – and they will leave immediately. One does not have to *keep on* commanding them (as many people do). Jesus cast out demons with a single sentence: *“When He spoke a single word, all the demons fled” (Matt.8:16-Living Bible)*. If demons do not leave after a *single* command of ours, it would indicate that *our* faith is weak. Then we need to go away and fast and pray first (*Matt.17:21*).

On another occasion, a sister from our church brought a lady to my home for prayer because she was having some problems. My wife and I spoke with the lady and then I asked her to repent of her sins and to receive Jesus as her Saviour. I also asked her to speak to Satan and tell him, *“I don’t belong to you now. Jesus defeated you on the cross”*. (I ask all who want to be saved to say this to Satan). All of a sudden, she contorted her

face, and looked at me fiercely and changed her voice and said, “I was *not* defeated on the cross”. Until then I had not even suspected that she had a demon, for she had spoken to us gently. But when I realized that a demon was there, I immediately said to the demon, “You are a liar. You *were* defeated on the cross. Get out of her in Jesus’ Name.” The demon left immediately. I knew that it had left, because when I asked the lady a second time to say the same words to Satan, she said it immediately, without any hesitation.

That day I learnt a *third* lesson about Satan and demons – that they don’t like to be reminded that they were defeated on the cross. So I decided thereafter, that I would remind Satan frequently that Jesus defeated him on the cross. I also decided to teach this glorious truth to all believers. (We have to *speak* these words to Satan, since he cannot hear our thoughts or what we say in our mind.) It is because many Christians either don’t know, or don’t believe, in Satan’s total defeat on the cross (as written in *Colossian 2:15* and *Hebrews 2:14*) that they live in fear of him and are afraid that he might harm them in some way.

The Lord also gave me dreams now and then – dreams in which I saw myself facing demon-possessed people and casting out the demons from them. I also saw dreams where Satan came as a snake or a scorpion etc., to me, but was unable to harm me, even when those creatures touched my body. Jesus told His disciples, “*I give you authority, so that you can walk on snakes and scorpions and overcome all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you*” (*Lk.10:19-TEV*). An interesting feature of all these dreams was that I never had a moment of fear - either during the dream or thereafter. Thus, the Lord taught me that I could face Satan fearlessly at all times - exactly as Jesus Himself had faced him on this earth.

“Greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world - (Satan).....

“As Jesus is, so also are we in this world.....

“We do not fear now, for God’s perfect love for us has driven away all our fear” (1 John 4:4,17,18).

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 32

Early Days Of Meeting And Outreach

From the outset (August 1975), we met together three or four times each week as a church in our home. We did not know what God had in store for us in the future. We were all poor families struggling to make ends meet. I was the only one who had a scooter. The others had only bicycles or nothing. And I was also the only one who had a telephone (and that too was allotted to us only because Annie was a doctor). But we had great fellowship with each other and we discovered as a church what it meant to be a family.

Annie and I had three boys (aged 6 years, 2 years, and 8 months) when we started meeting as a church in our home. Our fourth son was born 3 years later. Our children enjoyed arranging the chairs for the meetings, and fellowshiping with the young brothers who often ate with us and stayed overnight in our home. We cared for one another in the church and we used to meet someone from the church almost every day. If anyone was in any need, we would all pitch in and help that person or family. When any family had to move to a new rented house, all of us men would go and help them to shift. I was less than 40 years old in those days and I could do many things then that I can't do today. I remember carrying cupboards down the stairs and scrubbing the floors and cleaning the toilets in the houses of many of my fellow-believers. Some joined us only to take advantage of our goodness and our generosity and we were cheated by a few. But we have no regrets about that today, because we acted in goodness and love to them. And we learnt from our mistakes. We continued to emphasize discipleship and the way of the cross. As a result, over a period of time, those who were not gripped by this message dropped away from our midst.

We soon felt a burden to share these wonderful truths that had transformed our own lives with others in India. So in January 1977, we started an 8-page monthly paper containing the message of the overcoming life. I used to type the articles on my old typewriter, correct them, retype them and then give the paper to the printer to set up. We did not have much money. So we had to use a cheap print-shop that had only a "*letter press*" (with lead types), where they set up the paper, one alphabet at a time!! After a few days, the *first* proof would be ready and I would go and pick it up from the printer and check through it. There would be numerous mistakes to correct. I would give it back to the printer who would correct those mistakes and give it back to me to check once again. I would check through it again before the final copy was printed. At times, in spite of my checking through the final copy three or four times, the "*printer's devil*" would still be active. In one issue, the words "We should *never* be anxious", lost one letter and came out as "We should *ever* be anxious"!! So some of us sat down and corrected all the printed copies by hand! Over the next few years, we gradually built up a mailing list of about 600 addresses. Each month, some of our church-members would gather together on a Sunday and put the paper into envelopes for mailing. One by-product of doing it this way was that it built fellowship between ourselves.

We also taped each message that was preached – primarily for the benefit of those in our church who wanted to listen to the message a second time or who wanted to give a copy of it to someone else. Little by little, we built up a small library of tapes. To make these copies, I would connect two tape-recorders together and copy one side of the tape first, and then turn the tape over to copy the other side. It would take me 90 minutes to copy one tape!! Sometimes people from other places in India who had heard about us, would ask for a tape. I would then copy a tape, pack it and go to the post office and mail

it. We did not have many requests for tapes those days. So I was able to do this all by myself. The requests for tapes increased slowly – and I was kept quite busy.

But God in His foreknowledge, saw that the requests for our tapes would increase enormously in the coming days. And He had a pleasant surprise in store for us, for He “*silently plans for us in love*” at all times (*Zeph.3:17* paraphrase). A family in Germany (whom I had never met or corresponded with) had got a copy of a tape of mine from someone and heard it and passed it on to others. Because they were all blessed by what they heard, they wrote to me saying that they were led by the Lord to mail us a fast tape-copier. I never even knew that such a machine existed! When the machine arrived, the postal customs officials made an unreasonable and exorbitant demand for customs duty. They probably wanted a bribe, which I would *not* give. So I prayed to the Lord for help and went and met the senior-most officer in the department. She happened to be a Christian who had read my books and knew my name, even though we had never met before. I told her that I was willing to pay the legal customs duty on the item – whatever it was. I just didn’t want to pay a bribe or to be unnecessarily harassed. So she spoke to the official concerned immediately. Thus I got the parcel, after paying just the legal amount of customs duty and without being harassed.

This machine could copy a tape in 3 minutes. That saved me 87 minutes on every single tape I copied!! The demand for tapes increased by leaps and bounds, shortly thereafter and we copied thousands of tapes on that machine in the ensuing years. How good God was to prompt someone to give us that gift at just the right time. We have always believed that we should never make our needs known to anyone but God. This was yet another proof of His loving provision and care for us.

We made a decision right at the beginning, that all our literature and tapes would be given out at the lowest possible cost, without our making any profit on them. No royalties would be paid to me for any book or tape of mine that the church published. And we have stuck to that principle all these years.

Over 200,000 tapes of sermons have now (upto 2007) been distributed around the world in many languages – not only by our church but also by many other individuals and churches. These messages are now going out through CDs and DVDs as well – and also being downloaded freely from the Internet every day. Thus the new-covenant message has gone to all five continents from our small church. We rejoice that people are being challenged to live an overcoming life, all over the world.

We give all the glory to God for what He has done!! When we honour Him, He honours us. Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 33

A Meeting Place

Over a period of four years (1975-1979), the church meeting in our house increased in numbers. Some who came were really sincere and eager to be disciples of Jesus. But others came because they were attracted by the novelty of joining a *new* group!! We received everyone and left it to God to filter out the chaff in His own time. The rooms in our house were all small and people sat in four rooms on Sundays, with the speaker standing in a central place from where most people could see him!

From the very first year, we arranged 4-day conferences in our house, during the holiday season in October, every year. Some who had been blessed by our literature in other parts of India, also attended these conferences. We offered food and accommodation freely to everyone who came and even helped some who were poor with their train-fare. We cooked the food in the backyard of my house. The brothers slept on the floor in the front room of our house at night. We never took any offerings at any time – not even during the conferences. We kept an offering box at the entrance for any who wanted to give – secretly and cheerfully. And God provided all our needs. We have followed this policy for 31 years now – and have found that all our needs have always been met. We have never had to borrow money and we've never been in debt. God has honoured this policy of ours, as we have sought to honour Him.

With the increasing numbers coming to our Sunday meetings, we realized that soon we would not all fit into our house. At the same time we didn't have the money to buy land anywhere nearby. So we started looking for land that was cheaper, outside the city limits. But we could not find any place there either, that we could afford.

Then the Lord did something wonderful for us. My father had purchased a piece of land close to our house and paid the initial down-payment (20%) for it. He had planned to sell his house in Madras and build a house for himself in Bangalore. But he suddenly developed asthma while in Bangalore, and realized that the climate here would not suit him and that the Lord was thus stopping him from moving to Bangalore. So he decided to sell the land. Many were keen on buying it from him, for it was located in a prime area and its value had gone up. But my father decided to *gift* the land to our church. (We would have to pay only the balance of the money due and the registration charge).

But we had only 50% of the money required for this in our account – *and that was what we had saved up in 4 years!!* We decided that we would not tell anyone about our needs – not even others in the church, for all the brothers were relatively poor, and we did not want anyone sacrificing and giving us their life's savings. We prayed and told the Lord that if this was the place He had chosen for us, then He must give us the money, without our mentioning our need to anyone.

We had to register the land by a certain date – the final date that the original owner had set for my father to pay the balance amount, for transfer of the property. Just a few days before this deadline, we got a cheque in the mail. It was sent by a person whom none of us had ever met or heard of. So he could not possibly have known of our need either. He had obtained our address from somewhere. And amazingly, the amount of the cheque was *the exact amount that we had needed* to complete the land-transaction!! We have never met this donor to this day – and he never sent us any money again, after this one time!! It was obvious to us that God had prompted him to help us. Many would call such events as “*coincidences*”. But for us, it was the perfect provision of our loving Father in heaven, confirming to us that the purchase of this land was in His perfect will.

We registered the land in the name of “*Christian Fellowship Centre*”. We now needed to build a meeting-hall on it. Again we decided that we would not mention our need to anyone. Little by little over the next two years, money trickled in – from our offering box and from here and there.

Then we faced another problem. There was a shortage of cement in the country at that time, and a *permit* had to be obtained from the Government to buy cement – 50 bags at a time. We applied for the cement and I went and saw the clerk in the State government-office for our *first* permit. He told me to come back the next week. I went back the next week and he told me to come back later. This went on for sometime, until someone who was wiser to the ways of government-offices told me that this was the clerk’s way of asking for a bribe! So we prayed. I met the Director in the department and kept going back to the office – and acquired a lot of patience thereby! Finally, after many weeks, we got our *first* permit. I had applied only for cement. But I got patience as well in the process! God always give us more than we ask for!

God used a corrupt official to enable me to partake of the Divine nature – patience! If I had given him a bribe, I would have got the cement earlier. But I would *not* have got the *patience*. God then answered our prayers even more than we had expected. Soon, cement became plentifully available in India, and the government cancelled the requirement for a permit. Then we could buy all the cement we wanted from the market.

We completed the meeting-hall and had our first meeting there in October 1981. We arranged a conference also that month – and this time more people came than ever before. God had known that larger numbers would soon start attending our conferences. Seeing that need much before we saw it, He gave us a meeting-hall just in time – just as He gave us many other things, before the need for them arose.

God had silently planned for us in love once again – and He continues to do so even today (*Zeph.3:17*)!!

CHAPTER 34

Reaching Out To Other Places

For seven years we did not do any outreach as a church in Bangalore. God kept us concentrating on ourselves alone. This may have looked very introverted and selfish to others who observed us, but God knew what He was doing. There is a time and a season for everything in the will of God. We can never build the church of Jesus Christ as and when we like. We have to wait for God's time and must be led by His Spirit at each step.

God knew that our church needed to be built together *as a family* first, before we could invite others in India to "*Come and see*". Under the old covenant, the emphasis was : "*Come and hear*". The old-covenant prophet would invite the Israelites to come and *hear* what God had told him. But under the new covenant, the emphasis is on a *visible manifestation* of the life of Christ through a local body of believers, and not just on a spoken message. Jesus said that all men would know that we are Christ's disciples, when they *see* our love for one another and not just when they *hear* us preach (*John 13:35*).

And so God built something into us as a church during those first seven years (1975 to 1982). He worked a deep work within many of us and taught us the way of the cross and thus we learnt to love one another. Thereafter, He opened one door after another for us to reach out to other parts of India – and finally to the rest of the world. God's way is always the best way.

In 1980, I was invited to speak for 3 days at the annual convention of the largest Pentecostal denomination in India. There must have been 12,000 people at that convention. I told them that the burden the Lord had laid on my heart was to speak, not to the laymen, but to their pastors and leaders (many of whom were sitting on the platform). I spoke for two days on being righteous in the use of money in Christian work. On the third morning the senior pastors sent me a message saying that they did not want me to preach again. Many of them were offended by my plain speaking. I accepted their decision joyfully, for I felt that the Lord must have finished saying whatever He wanted to say in two days – and there was nothing more to be said.

After the convention was over I had to go to another place in Kerala. The convention's organizers could easily have taken me there in one of their cars – but they did not. So I carried my bag and went to the bus-stop and looked for a bus that could take me there. I was not familiar with the bus routes in those parts and ended up boarding the wrong bus. I discovered my mistake only after I had travelled for some distance. So I got down from that bus and got into another bus. But the Lord had planned all this with a purpose. The second bus was packed with people and I had to stand. But right in front of me stood a young brother who was also returning from the same convention. We talked with each other for just about ten minutes and then he had to get off. But that encounter was the beginning of a relationship that has lasted until today. He told me later how he was seeking desperately for a victorious life at that time and was sure that it was God Who had sent me across his path that day.

God used this brother later to open the door for a church to be started at Kottayam – and from there to many other parts of Kerala. I saw that God had sent me there primarily to meet this one brother and not to speak to 12,000 people. How good it was that the convention's organizers did *not* take me *by car* that day. How good it was that I got into the *wrong* bus. If it were not for these events, I might have missed meeting this dear brother altogether. And how good it was that when I met him, I was not in a bad mood for the insults and inconveniences I had faced, but in a spirit of thanksgiving for God's

sovereignty. God plans all things perfectly and so we can give him thanks – *for all things at all times!*

In early 1983, this brother invited me to take special meetings for a small church of about 50 people that he was attending in Kottayam. I had also received an invitation to be the main speaker at the annual convention of another large Pentecostal denomination where many thousands would be present – *at the very same time*. I prayed about these two invitations and felt led by the Lord to turn down the invitation to the large convention and to go instead to the small church. That one decision had far-reaching consequences. A handful of people in this small church were gripped by the truths of the new covenant and decided to pull out of their denomination and to gather separately. That was the beginning of our work in Kerala. As in Jesus' time, even so today, the Lord is looking, not for large crowds, but for wholehearted disciples.

In the same year (early 1983), God opened the doors to Tamilnadu as well. In May 1982 I had been invited to speak at a denominational convention in Madras. A pastor who heard me there invited me to speak at some special meetings in Madurai. Some born-again young men (who were members of a large denomination in Tuticorin) came to attend those meetings. They were gripped by what they heard. But they did not have the money or the influence to organize a meeting for me in their hometown. But, in the providence of God, someone who was working in another organization arranged a series of public meetings for me in Tuticorin. A number of pastors from the city were present at the very first meeting. But by the end of the very *first* meeting, they were all offended by my message and never came back. Interestingly, the organizer of the special meetings also got offended and disappeared!!

So these young men (who had heard me in Madurai) took over the meetings and led the singing – and I spoke. I was impressed by the zeal of these young men and met with them privately later. We spent many hours talking together late into the night – past midnight. Then I realized that all the preceding events had been planned by God only to enable me to meet with this group of young men. Later in June 1983, these young men decided to leave their denomination and started meeting together separately as a church. They invited me to come and guide them and thus we had our first church conference in Tuticorin in 1983. How good it was that the organizer of the Tuticorin meetings got offended and left me with these fine young men. The ways of God are truly amazing.

A few weeks later we had some special meetings in Thanjavur and there too, I met some brothers who were gripped by the message of victory over sin. These meetings opened many doors in Tamilnadu and very soon a number of local churches were planted all over the State.

We never did any of this according to our own wisdom or our own plans. God planned and executed His work in His own sovereign way. We just followed “*the pillar of cloud*” as God led us from one place to another!!

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 35

Delivering People Oppressed By the Devil

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38).

Jesus’ example mentioned here, indicates that those who are anointed will have *the power of God* (see Acts 1:8) and *the presence of God* with them. As a result they will go about doing good and delivering people from the oppression of Satan.

Delivering people from Satan’s oppression is one of the main ministries that we have as new-covenant servants. Those under the *old* covenant could not do this, because Satan had not been defeated in those days.

But now that Satan has been defeated on the cross, he has no more power over any child of God who walks in the light. This was one of the great truths that the Lord taught me and that He wanted me to proclaim to believers everywhere. He gave me some experiences to prove this too.

There was a house close to ours in which an aged man was sick. To cure him they got a witch-doctor who spent some weeks, concocting some potion in a pot openly in their garage. One morning, we found a small pot containing something, lying inside our compound. We had heard that witchdoctors try to transfer a sickness from one house to another in this way – and therefore, many people are afraid even to touch such a pot, fearing that some harm will come to them. But for us, this was a great opportunity to teach our children the impotence of Satan against God’s children. So we just picked up the pot and threw it away. And we taught our children that we need never fear Satan – for he cannot touch us, if we walk in the light. No harm came to us. But the old man in that house died. But I gave him the gospel before he died. No weapon formed against us can ever prosper (*Isa.54:17*).

Demon-possessed people used to be brought to our house at times for deliverance. Some Christians warned us that we should not cast out demons inside our home, since we had small children in our home. But we had no such fear – for Satan is a defeated enemy. Our calling was to do what Jesus did – to deliver people from Satan’s oppression everywhere. God Himself would protect our children. So we continued to cast out demons in our house. And neither we nor our children ever had any problem at any time. It only increased their faith in the power of God.

Once at the end of a conference, someone brought a young girl to me for prayer. As I was talking to her asking her to give her life to the Lord, she turned around to me suddenly, changed her voice and said, “I have been here for so long and are you trying to cast me out?” I was taken aback for a moment by these words. But I knew then that she was possessed by a demon. I prayed in tongues (softly, under my breath) to build up my faith in the Lord’s power and then commanded the demon to leave, in Jesus’ Name. Since I had to rush away to catch a bus, I asked the local elders there to check that the demon had indeed left her. I met the girl later and found that she had been totally freed.

We had two occasions when demon-possessed people came right into our church-building in Bangalore, while a meeting was going on. On one occasion, as we began our afternoon session at a conference, a man came crawling up one of the aisles, like a snake, to the front of the hall. I had just begun the Bible-study and didn’t want Satan to disturb the study with any side-issues. So I commanded the demon in Jesus’ Name, to lie down

where he was. The man went to sleep immediately on the spot. As soon as the Bible-study was over and we had said the final Amen, the man woke up immediately. Then we counselled him.

On another occasion, someone came to our church-hall, just as our Sunday meeting was getting over and wanted to meet me. I told him to ask Jesus to come into his life and to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He shouted out in the presence of the whole church, "Jesus Christ is *not* Lord". Since he was a nominal Christian, I realized that this was not him speaking but a demon. I commanded the demon to leave him, in Jesus' Name. He suddenly took a *karate* position and then slid down to the floor like a snake. That was the day I discovered that there were demonic spirits behind martial arts like *karate*. I then picked him up and told him to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He did so immediately, and told us that the migraine he had been having until then was gone. These two events strengthened the faith of many in our church.

In a public meeting in one part of India, many years ago, where 30,000 people were present, as I was speaking from the platform, a man in the audience suddenly got up and started dancing in front of the platform. I requested him to sit down – more than once. But he kept on dancing, distracting the people. I then realized that this was a demon. I commanded him in Jesus' Name to sit down – and he sat down *immediately*. There is tremendous power in the Name of Jesus. Demons tremble at that Name and they have to obey instantly.

In the U.S.A., a young lady was once brought to me for counselling at the end of a meeting. I was surprised to see her dressed in very dirty clothes - because that was not the way young American ladies dressed. I shared the gospel with her and asked her to repeat the sinner's prayer after me, to receive Christ as her Saviour. When I came to the Name of Jesus in the prayer, she was silent. She said she could not say that Name. Only then did I realize that she had a demon. I commanded the demon to leave her and she was delivered immediately. Then I commanded her in Jesus Name to call upon the Name of Jesus. She did so immediately and was saved. The transformation in her appearance was so amazing, that she was hardly recognizable when she came to the meetings the next morning smartly dressed! What that dear young lady needed was not some psychiatric counselling but deliverance!

I have said all this not to speak about what I have done, but so that believers everywhere might recognize that Christ has defeated Satan on the cross. This ministry of deliverance is being exercised not only by me, but by others in our churches too. Any child of God who walks in the light and knows the authority there is in the Name of Jesus can cast out demons.

The tragedy however has been that *many* who were delivered from demons kept their house (heart) empty, and thus were exposed to more severe demonic attacks later – exactly as Jesus warned in *Matthew 12:43-45*.

However, *some* who were delivered have gone on to seek God earnestly, and been filled with the Holy Spirit, and become disciples of Jesus. Some are now elders in our churches.

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 36

Travelling Mercies

I have been in fulltime service for the Lord for nearly 41 years now (2007) and I have been travelling constantly. My wife (Annie) and I have travelled many hundreds of thousands of miles all over the world – by cycle, bullock-cart, moped, scooter, bus, auto-rickshaw, car, train, boat and aeroplane. I have been amazed at God's goodness and protection over us in all these years.

By God's grace, as far as I can remember, I have *not* missed a single series of meetings (that I had committed myself to), in all these 41 years – whether due to sickness, or a missed bus, or a missed train, or a missed flight, or due to any other reason. This has been entirely as a result of God working on our behalf.

I am 68 years old now and God has kept me in remarkably good health all these years. He equips our bodies in our mother's womb itself with whatever abilities are required for the ministry He has planned for us. Two very important requirements for those who travel constantly are the ability to *sleep anywhere* and to *eat anything* – and God equipped my body with these two abilities when I was born. As a result, I am able to sleep anywhere even today – on a bed or on the floor, in a car or in a bus, in a train or on an aeroplane. He also equipped my body to eat any type of food – western, eastern or nothing (for a few days!!). This has made travelling to every part of the world much easier for me. I cannot boast about this, for this is entirely God's doing, in the way He made my body. I only praise God for His goodness. The worst thing I have ever experienced in my body has been the loss of my voice on just two or three occasions, after much speaking.

For the last 25 years I have been going every year to Tuticorin, for the conferences of our Tamilnadu churches in South India. For many years, no train service was available to Tuticorin and I had to travel overnight by bus for 16 hours to get there. The roads had numerous potholes – which ensured that we stayed awake most of the time!! By the time we reached Tuticorin, the first session of the conference would already have started - and I would have to go straight to the meeting to preach God's Word. I would then speak at 9 or 10 one-hour sessions during the next three days; and immediately after the last meeting, catch the bus for the 16-hour journey back home. Yet by God's grace, I have never fallen ill or lost my voice at any of these conferences in all these 25 years.

Travelling in India gives us some unforgettable experiences too! I had my pocket picked twice – once while traveling in a crowded bus in Madras and a second time when traveling in a crowded train in Bombay. My money was stolen, but not my joy – for I had ensured that my joy would always be in my heart and not in my wallet! I also prayed for the two pickpockets. I am sure they needed someone to pray for them. Perhaps that was why God allowed them to pick *my pocket!!* God allowed this to happen also to free me a little more from the love of money. God had to liberate me from being calculating in my attitude to money - so that I would *not grieve* over every rupee lost *or rejoice* over every rupee gained! He wanted me to find my joy in Him – and in Him alone – a joy that could not be increased by any material gain or decreased by any material loss.

In the early days of my ministry, I had to travel for many hours in crowded, unreserved train-compartments. Most of the time, the benches would all be occupied and I would have to sit on the floor, or at times stand for the entire length of the journey. The compartment would be packed with people and luggage from the starting station itself. Things would get worse at each station along the way, with more people and more luggage coming in – and *the physical pressure on me would keep on increasing, as also*

the temptation to complain against the incoming passengers. It was on one of these occasions that God gave me this revelation: “If I could become the size of an ant here, I would find no pressure on me at all. I find the pressure to be too much only because I am so big. An ant however would find this crowded compartment quite spacious. There is a spiritual lesson here: *If I am always small in my own eyes, I will be free from all pressure and tension and complaints against others. Then I can always be at rest in God!*” I found that I could learn something in every situation.

Once when I was travelling in an unreserved train-compartment, every bench was fully occupied. But I saw one man sitting cross-legged on one of the benches, occupying the space for two people. Since I had to travel all night on that train, I asked him if he could put his legs down, so that I could get a small space to sit. But he would not oblige. The others who were sitting on the bench sympathized with me and were ready to help me find space to sit; but this man would not move an inch. I prayed then that the Lord would fill his bladder so that he would have to go to the toilet. Within five minutes he got up and went to the toilet!! The others on the bench quickly moved over and filled up the *extra* space that he had been occupying and gave me space to sit down.

In many overnight trains in India, reservations have to be made many days earlier (usually 60 days before the journey), to get a sleeping berth. Once I was invited to a certain place in South India for meetings and this required an overnight train journey. So, 60 days earlier, I asked the brother (who had invited me) to book a sleeping-berth for my return journey to Bangalore. But he forgot to do this and realized his mistake only when I reached his place for the meetings. He apologized for his carelessness and sent someone immediately to the train-station, to book a berth for me. But I could get only a *seat* in the 2-tier compartment on the train. All the sleeping-berths had already been booked. When the meetings were over, I got into the train. I refused to complain but praised the Lord for giving me only a seat and not a sleeping-berth. Next to me sat an old Roman Catholic nun. She asked me if I could do her a favour. She had a sleeping berth on the top bunk, but said that she was too old to climb up to her berth. If I could take her berth, she could curl up and sleep on the lower seats. I told her that I would be glad to help her in this way!! And thus I got a sleeping berth for my journey back to Bangalore – and I didn’t even have to pay for it.

Such incidents were not major earth-shaking events, but they showed me that my loving heavenly Father cared for even my smallest comforts, as I travelled in His service. God is good – all the time.

“He knows every detail of what is happening to me” (Job 23:10-Living).

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 37

Planting Churches In Other Countries

Jesus told His disciples that when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, they would “receive power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). God does His work slowly and steadily – *in ever increasing circles*. I have found this to be true in my own ministry too.

We never planned to start a new church in Bangalore. That was entirely God’s doing. And then, we never thought God would reach out through us to other parts of India. When we saw churches being planted in different parts of India, we were thrilled. We then thought that our calling was only for India. But God had other plans for us.

One of the prayers that I have prayed for many years is this: “*Lord, if there is anyone seeking for a godly life in these parts, either lead him to us or lead us to him. If you don’t do either of these, then tell us what is wrong with us.*” As we have prayed this prayer, God has shown us many things that we needed to set right in our church. One of the main things He showed us was the legalistic and unfriendly spirit that we had, that we needed to get rid of. As we started cleansing ourselves from this, the Lord began to send hungry people to us – first from Bangalore, then from other parts of India and finally from different parts of the world. We did not go looking for these people. God sent them to us.

Here are *five* examples of the planting of churches in some countries. (I have not mentioned the names of the people or of the countries – in order to preserve anonymity.)

Foreign Country 1: A young brother living in this country (but originally from India) came to India to visit his relatives. While in Madras, a neighbour gave him a copy of the monthly paper that we were publishing, that contained an article of mine. He was challenged by what he read and decided to meet me when he visited Bangalore. I was not in town when he came home. But he met Annie and took some of our books and returned to his homeland. He was gripped by what he read and came back to India the next year and spent six weeks in Bangalore and fellowshipped with our church. When he returned to his country, he looked for others who were interested in an overcoming life – and found one or two. A few years later, he asked me if I would come to his country to meet with just the three of them. I agreed and went and shared the Word with them. From that small beginning, a church was born that is now an expression of Christ’s Body in that city. I have visited them a number of times in the last 20 years and we have had conferences for the church as well as meetings for the public. The Lord has added some wonderful brothers and sisters to this church and also removed some who were not called to be with us. The brother who contacted us initially is now the elder leading this church. As a result of visiting this church, God has given me openings to other cities in this country and this has resulted in many being gripped by the truth in those cities too.

Foreign Country 2: In the early 1970s, when speaking at a conference in this country I visited a large church here and become acquainted with a brother. He invited me to visit him any time I was passing through. *Ten years later*, I suddenly felt a burden to visit him – but I didn’t know why. I did not have the money for my airfare. So I sold my moped (two-wheeler) and bought an air-ticket and travelled to this country. I arrived on a Saturday and this brother arranged for me to stay in the guest room of their church. On Sunday, the speaker who was supposed to speak at that church’s morning service had not arrived (because his flight had been delayed). The elders heard that I was in town and asked me to speak. God gave me a word for them and I had great liberty as I preached. The meeting was so blessed that the elders asked me if I would speak again. I agreed –

and they immediately arranged special meetings during the next three evenings. After each evening meeting, I spent many hours talking to a number of the young brothers. Our talk-sessions would end at 2 am in the morning – for those young men were all hungry to know the truth. Six months later, these young brothers left their church and started meeting together on their own. They invited me for their first church-conference. Thereafter I visited them every year for a number of conferences. Over time, as in every place, some brothers left the church and new brothers came to take their place. This has been God’s way everywhere.

Foreign Country 3: A young Indian brother (originally working in another foreign country) heard some of my tapes on the new wine (Matt.5, 6 and 7) and the new wineskin (the new-covenant church). He repented, took baptism and decided to be a disciple. When he came to India on vacation, an Indian pastor told him that I was preaching false doctrines and warned him to avoid all contact with me. Wanting to find out the truth for himself, this brother came to Bangalore and spent some hours with me and discovered that the accusations he had heard were all false – based on ignorance and jealousy. Later he heard me at a public meeting and realized the importance of family life as a disciple. Since he could not take his family to the country where he was working, he resigned his job there and returned to India, so that he could give priority to his family. The Lord honoured him and gave him a better job in this foreign country, where he could take his family also with him. He stood for the truth and two other families joined him. (At the first conference we had here, we had 3 days of meetings for just these three families!!) A little later, the other two families got offended and left. But God brought in new families. Since then, I have visited them a number of times and the Lord has added many others. The church here has been used by God for many years now to spread His Word through tapes and CDs to many thousands of people around the world.

Foreign Country 4: Along with the above brother, there was yet another brother working in *this* country who also heard the same two tapes (mentioned above). He too was gripped by the truth and broke away from the group he was with and decided to build a new-covenant church. I had the opportunity to visit this country too and we had a few conferences there for the local church. As in other places, here too, God has added some people and removed some people through the years. But the church continues on.

Foreign Country 5: I went to this country just for the purpose of meeting two young brothers from India who had gone to work there. I had planned to stay there only for a day or two. No meetings had been planned, for I knew no-one else there. But my departure was unexpectedly delayed for 4 or 5 days, because I could not get a visa for my onward travel to another country – because the immigration offices were all closed for 4 days of holidays. So I decided to have meetings here every day – morning, afternoon and evening. It was an unplanned conference – unplanned by men, but planned by God. God led us during that time to a wonderful brother who was seeking for a godly life. Now there is a flourishing church there under his leadership. “*The steps (as well as the stops) of God’s servants are ordered by the Lord*” (Psa.37:23). Praise the Lord!

The Lord is sovereign in the way He leads us in His work. All authority in heaven and on earth is in His hands and that is why He has told us go to every land and make disciples – and He has promised to be with us as we go (Matt.28:18-20). In the last 32 years, I have found that the Lord has faithfully accompanied me everywhere I have gone to make disciples. The most amazing thing of all is that He has raised up godly elders to lead His churches in all these countries.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 38

No Dependence on the West

I had an encounter with a refined Hindu gentleman in Madras 40 years ago (in 1967), that I have never forgotten. I was engaged in open-air evangelism and offered the gentleman a book written by an American Christian. He immediately asked me if I was a paid agent of America. I was shocked. I was certainly no agent of any country, preacher or organization – Western or Indian. That man did not know that I had quit a well-paying job in order to serve the Lord Jesus – and I was certainly *not* preaching to earn my living!! But I realized that I was giving my countrymen a wrong impression when I promoted books written by Western Christians. *It is the impression we give to others that is ultimately our message.* That incident challenged me considerably and opened my eyes very early in my ministry as to how I was to serve the Lord in India.

Most Indians feel that Christianity is a Western religion. They also feel that Christian workers in India are all paid agents of American organizations, and preach only because they have to send reports to the West, in order to get more *dollars* (or *euros*) so that they can live in luxury. So I felt I must do everything possible to remove this false impression from the minds of my fellow-Indians – if my witness to them was to be effective. As Sadhu Sundar Singh once said, “*We must give the water of life to our fellow-Indians in an Indian cup*”.

For nearly 50 years now, I have had the opportunity to travel all over India and to see the workings of many Christian organizations and churches (of many denominations). Here is what I have seen. (Please note that I am not judging anyone and that this is only *my personal opinion*):

1. More than 95% of fulltime Christian workers in India (that I know of), ***have never ever worked in any secular job***. In fact, most of them would not have been able to get a *decent, well-paying job*, in the secular field, even if they tried. Yet many of them earn **10 times** what their colleagues earn in the secular field. These “*Christian workers*” have free houses and cars and other perquisites (given by their rich Western sponsors) – that only the rich people in India can afford. So Christianity has become a means of *gain* for them – and not a way of *sacrifice* – as it was for Jesus and the apostles. The gospel records show that Jesus never called a single *unemployed* person to be an apostle. He called only those *who were employed* – and they had to *sacrifice everything* before they could follow Him. It is such people that He is calling even today.

2. Most Christian work in India ***cannot survive without Western aid***. And so we see the sad spectacle of “*begging letters*” (called “*prayer letters*”) and exaggerated reports of conversions, being sent constantly from Christian organizations in India to the West. Nowadays, many shrewd Christian workers have started asking their Western sponsors for large amounts of money, so that they can invest it in buildings and property in India, so as to become self-sufficient in the future – just like the shrewd manager in the parable in *Luke 16:1-8*. Any non-Christian can see through such American sponsorship of Indian Christianity. And now with the widespread preaching of the prosperity gospel and the unashamed begging for money by American preachers on TV in India, (90% of the preachers on Christian TV in India are Americans), the non-Christians in India are convinced that Christianity is not only an American religion, but a money-making racket as well!!

3. Christian theology in India imitates ***Western theology*** blindly – in every church and Bible-school that I have seen. Most Indian Christian preachers have no original revelation

and merely repeat what they have read in Western books. *It is as though God speaks only to Americans and not to Indians!!* Indian Christian preachers imitate Western preachers even in their pulpit-mannerisms! The old slave mentality (carried over from the days of British rule) makes them follow Western music practices and imitate Western preacher-habits (such as pushing people down on the platform, and asking the audience to repeat some slogan to their neighbour, etc.,). The slogans that are popular among Western Christians have become the slogans of their clones in India too!

All these factors have compromised our witness as Indian Christians in India.

Indian money is *not* holier than Western money. So anyone (Westerner or Indian) can support God's work in India. But I felt that ***dependence*** on the West would present a wrong picture of Christianity to my countrymen. So when we started planting churches in India over 30 years ago, I decided that, with God's help, we would tread a different path: ***We would not be dependent on the West or on any man – either for our earthly needs or for our theology.***

I had decided when I left the Navy, that I would discipline myself never to receive more income than what I would have received if I had continued working in the Navy. I had also decided to live at a lower standard always than what I had in the Navy – because Jesus lived at a lower standard on earth than what He had in heaven. I also decided never to accept gifts from anyone who earned less than what I did, or whose standard of living was lower than mine – for this was the position that Jesus took too.

By the grace of God, I have ***never*** had to make my ***personal*** needs or the needs of my ***ministry*** known to any man thus far. My heavenly Father has always provided those needs in one way or the other. He has also sovereignly determined ***how much*** I should receive - and I have ***always*** been happy with His decisions. The result has been that, like Jesus, I too have never had to borrow money from anyone and I have never been in debt to anyone at any time. When preaching in churches in the West and in the rich Gulf countries, I have been introduced as “*the one Indian preacher who never asks for any money either for himself or for his ministry*”. I am glad to have such a reputation – for that was Jesus' attitude to money too.

I also decided that I would question every doctrine taught by men – even by the greatest of Bible-scholars – and accept only what I saw clearly in the Scriptures myself. So I rejected the blind following of Western theology that was being practised by Indian Christians everywhere. Here are three examples of what I have rejected:

1. The unScriptural Western teaching that the church would be raptured ***before*** the great tribulation.
2. The unScriptural definitions of the gifts of the Spirit proclaimed by *Western* charismatic preachers.
3. The unScriptural pulpit-practices of *Western* charismatic preachers that they claim are manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

I decided to demonstrate to my countrymen that Christianity came to India from ***heaven*** and ***not*** from the West. I was convinced that the Lord wanted me to have a clear, unequivocal testimony in this matter before my fellow-Indians, if I was to be an effective witness for Him in India.

I decided to be a living witness and demonstration to my fellow-Indians of the truth that if I sought God's kingdom and His righteousness first, He would provide all my earthly needs.

There must be no *earthly* explanation for the godliness of our life, or for the effectiveness of our ministry, or for the provision of our earthly needs. *The explanation must only be that our Father in heaven supports us and provides all our needs – and not that we have contacts with some rich people in the West. Only thus will God alone get all the glory from our lives.*

May it be so with all of us. Amen

CHAPTER 39

Life At Home

The Bible says that if a man cannot run his home in a way that glorifies God, he is unfit for any leadership or ministry in the church (*1 Tim.3:5*). The church is God's family. And our own family is the place where God tests us to see whether we are fit for ministry in His church. We have to build our own family in a godly way first, before we can build God's family.

Since I was often travelling in the ministry, I sought God for wisdom to balance ministering to the needs of my family with ministering to the needs of the church. I often wished in those days, that I had a spiritual father whom I could go to, for practical advice on such matters – but I had none. And so I made lots of mistakes – but I gradually learnt from my mistakes and thus acquired some wisdom.

Since my income was small (from my “*tentmaking*” business), my wife had to be a woman of simple tastes, who was willing to live frugally and to work with her hands at home. She also had to be someone who *enjoyed* being hospitable, for we often had unexpected visitors in our home. How thankful I am that God gave me exactly such a wife in Annie. God had prepared Annie from her youth to be the type of wife I needed in my ministry. And she has made my ministry so much richer and so much more effective. After the Sunday meetings, we would often invite people home for lunch – especially those who had come from distant parts of Bangalore. I discovered later that Annie often went without lunch on many a Sunday, so as to feed those visitors!!

Many young brothers used to stay in our house overnight after the evening meetings, because it was too late for them to go home. They would have dinner with us and use our kitchen freely in the mornings to make coffee for themselves before going to college. We had a 4-day conference in our home every year during the early years – and then the house would be filled with visitors throughout the day.

Once I was away from home for ministry for five weeks. We had only three boys then – and all of them fell sick at the same time. Annie prayed for them, took care of them, never burdened me with the problem and did not even ask me to come home earlier to help her. When she married me, God had told her, “Your husband is My servant; and I have called you to support him, look after him and free him for My work.” And Annie has done that job faithfully for nearly 40 years now.

I didn't have victory over my anger when I first got married. But things changed after some years, by God's grace. And now our home relationship is glorious. Joking with each other *every day* is a major part of our life together. I have believed for a long time that humour between husband and wife is the clearest proof of a good relationship between them.

Since I was travelling frequently, it was Annie who had the major responsibility of bringing up our four sons in the ways of the Lord. She prayed *for* them and *with* them constantly. From their childhood days, she was their friend – talking with them when they came back from school about their experiences during the day. And she would play with them too.

My task as a father was to provide for them and to instruct them in godly principles. I took them to school on my scooter – until they were 12, after which age, they started going by bicycles on their own. And God protected all of us from serious accidents on the

roads more than once. All of us are alive today because the Lord sent His angels to protect us on Bangalore's dangerous roads.

I encouraged my boys in their education and also to participate in extra-curricular activities at school. Annie and I used to help them with their homework and studies (up to 10th Standard) – Annie much more than me.

It was my responsibility to discipline my sons. I followed what was written in *Proverbs* (and in *Hebrews 12*), that children should be disciplined. And so I did that, even though I never *relished* doing it. But I revered God and knew that His way was the best for my sons. After disciplining them, I would often pray with them. I knew that anger was a sin, and so I wanted to discipline my children *without* anger. But I didn't manage that *always*. And so, whenever I disciplined them in anger, I would get alone with God and repent and ask God to free me from my anger. I must admit that at times, I punished them by mistake too, due to faulty information. If I remember right, I rarely ever disciplined my boys *physically*, once they became 13 years of age and probably never after they crossed 15. After that age, if they did something wrong, I would pray with them and ask God to show me *where I had failed as a father in bringing them up*. And finally, I have to say that it was *not* my discipline that kept them in God's ways, but *God's mercy* alone.

If my sons had an event in which they were taking part, at school, Annie and I would attend it, to encourage them. When they had important public examinations, I would ensure that I was available in Bangalore to help them. I did *not* want any of them to ever say, "Daddy was so busy serving the Lord that he had no time for us." I would also take my sons out for a personal outing, one by one, once a month, usually on a Saturday or a holiday. We would go out and eat something simple somewhere and talk together. My sons always looked forward to these "*dates*". Unfortunately, because of my frequent travelling I did not do this as much as I should have. One of the greatest regrets I have today is that I did not spend more time with each of my boys *individually* – because of the demands of the ministry.

I remember vividly how, on the birthday of one of my sons, I had promised to take him out for the evening. He was all dressed up and excited to go. But just then a brother from our church came to see me with a problem and I spent a long time counseling him. By the time I had finished, it had become dark and it was too late to take my boy to the park. My son was terribly disappointed. To this day I remember that incident with great regret. I could have asked that brother to come and meet me the next day, since it was not an urgent matter. But I was not wise then. However, my son forgave me – and when I asked him about this incident much later, he did not even remember it. God is so good !! I would advise fathers to spend more time with their children and to keep all the promises they make to them.

I wanted to win the hearts of my boys at any cost – so that they would follow the Lord wholeheartedly. I wanted them to be servants of the Lord, ("*as tentmakers*"), as Paul served the Lord and as I myself was serving Him. Today I am thankful that all of them love the Lord – and also respect and honour Annie and me for what we tried to do for them – as imperfect parents.

All glory be to God alone.

CHAPTER 40

My Style Of Preaching

God, in His great wisdom, decided that He would save people by “*the foolishness of preaching*” (1 Cor.1:21-KJV). Preaching God’s Word is therefore the *greatest* work that any human being can be engaged in. I feel greatly honoured that God called me to this ministry. But preaching is also the one ministry that has been abused the most, by money-loving preachers and deceivers.

We are commanded to seek earnestly for the gift of *prophecy* (which is the gift of preaching in such a way as to encourage, challenge and build up people – 1 Cor.14:1,3). So I began to seek God for this gift as soon as I was baptized in water. And when God anointed me with the Holy Spirit, He gave me this gift as well. In the beginning, I was tempted to try and impress people with my preaching and to move them emotionally. But one day the Lord asked me, “Do you want to *help* people or do you want to *impress* them.” I said I wanted to *help* them. Then the Lord said, “Then don’t try to *impress* them.” It was not easy to overcome the temptation to impress people, but I fought against it, and gradually overcame it.

Each preacher has his own particular style of preaching. Most Indian preachers imitate American charismatic preachers. I decided that the best thing for me would be to pattern my preaching after Jesus’ style of preaching. So I studied the way Jesus preached.

The *first* thing I saw about Jesus was that He preached only what He had already practised. He *did* first and then *taught* (Acts 1:1). So His preaching always had a practical application. I knew that the Bible commanded me to “*prophecy only according to the proportion of my faith*” (Rom.12:6) – in other words, only up to the level of my spiritual experience. But I failed here, because I fell a prey to the temptation to impress people. And so, I ended up in a backslidden condition for some years. But God was merciful to me and filled me with the Holy Spirit again in January 1975 and restored me. I decided then, that I would preach thereafter only what I had already practiced and experienced, or (at least) what I was earnestly seeking after. God then took me through varied trials in order to teach me His ways and how to trust Him in difficult situations. Thus I grew in faith and wisdom – and I could pass on this faith and wisdom to others through my preaching.

Secondly, Jesus always preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. When He walked with the two disciples to Emmaus, He preached to them for two hours and *their hearts burned within them* throughout those two hours. I kept this example before me and wanted to preach like that *every time*. A chicken-leg taken out of the freezer is totally unappetizing. But the same leg when cooked on a fire makes everyone’s mouth to water. That is the difference between cold truth and the same truth preached with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Utter dependence on the anointing of the Holy Spirit therefore became primary in all my preaching. I depend on God every time I speak to anoint me, so that my words will set people’s hearts on fire.

Thirdly, Jesus spoke *primarily* to people’s *minds* and not to their emotions. His preaching challenged people and convicted them and stirred them to faith and obedience. He never whipped up their *emotions* the way many preachers do nowadays. We are told to love God with all our hearts and also with all our *minds*. I felt that all my messages must be like well-cooked meals – both nourishing and tasty!! So I needed to take more pains in preparing a sermon than any housewife ever took to prepare a good meal. A good housewife also lays out her meal in an attractive way. I also needed to arrange my

thoughts clearly, before I preached. Many preachers do not do this – and end up wasting people’s time by wandering around in their preaching. God is a God of order (*1Cor.14:33,40*) – and He is glorified when a message is presented in an orderly, understandable way.

Fourthly, Jesus had the right word for each occasion because of two reasons: He *listened to His Father constantly* (*Isa.50:4*) and He had a *great love for people*. So I studied God’s Word in all my spare moments to know God’s mind accurately. To understand the Scriptures, many preachers study Hebrew and Greek. But I saw that what I needed was not a knowledge of these languages, but the revelation of the Holy Spirit, since He was the Author of the Word. The Holy Spirit taught me many glorious truths from His Word that I never heard from any human being. These truths led me to a close walk with God and saved me from the deceptions and counterfeits that are flooding Christendom today. The Spirit then enabled me to teach these truths to others. The Holy Spirit also flooded my heart with love and compassion for His people (*Rom.5:5*). Thus my ministry gradually became one of encouragement and conviction, and not one of legalism and condemnation.

Fifthly, Jesus’ preaching was always *interesting* - and *never* boring. It is a sin to waste people’s time. Most preachers don’t realize that stealing people’s time is just like stealing their money. If we bore a congregation of 200 people *for just 15 minutes*, we have thereby robbed them of 50 man-hours of their time. If their average wage is Rs.50 per hour, we would thus have stolen Rs.2,500 from them in those 15 minutes. So I prayed to God that He would help me to preach in an interesting way and *never* bore anyone. In the early days, I could do this only for short periods of time. So I spoke only briefly then. As I grew in the knowledge of the Lord, I could speak for longer periods of time.

Sixthly, Jesus used many *simple* illustrations to make His message clear. He spoke about bread, fishes, birds, trees, flowers, pearls, farmers, buildings, etc., His simple illustrations made the deep truths He spoke about, much easier to understand. He did not seek to get a name for himself by using complicated illustrations that only clever people could understand. I sought to follow Jesus’ example here too. At times, I would look at some of the least educated people sitting in my church, and speak at their level. Then I found that my messages could be understood by everyone. I would ask little children after my preaching, whether they had understood what I had said. If *they* had not, then I knew that my preaching had to become still more simple.

Seventhly, Jesus used humor and exaggeration at times. He spoke of a camel going through a needle’s eye, of people straining out mosquitoes and swallowing camels, of those who had big logs in their eyes while looking for specks in the eyes of others – and thus He exposed hypocrisy and spiritual pride. Humour can sharpen a message and make it interesting, just like spices can add taste to food. Some preachers however go to an extreme in this, and try to make people laugh *all the time* (just to get a reputation for humor). Such preachers become like circus-clowns! I never use humour in my messages to entertain people – but only to keep them attentive during a long message, or to drive home a point.

Eighthly, Jesus repeated His messages many times. He did not seek for the honour that one can get, by preaching something *new* or *fanciful* on each occasion. People need to hear the same truth *many times* before they can be gripped by it. So I decided that I would *not* try to *impress* people by preaching something new in every message, but would repeat a message many times, until people were gripped by that truth. But every time I repeated a message, I would seek to present it in a fresh way, as led by the Spirit.

Ninthly, Jesus spoke without using notes. Because His walk with the Father was so close and intimate, the Spirit gave Him words to speak, even while He was preaching. Most preachers *cannot* speak like that, because they do not walk so close to God. And so it is best for 99% of preachers to prepare their messages carefully and to use written notes, if they want to preach effectively. That was how I started. But nowadays, I speak most of the time *without* using any notes. But when taking a Bible-study, I still use notes and write down the verses so that I don't forget any point. So I'm not a slave to either *using*, or *not using* notes, since neither of these methods is more spiritual than the other. If anyone wants to speak effectively without using notes:

1. He should have walked with God for many years, so that he can speak from his life's experience.
2. He must be living under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and have the supernatural gift of prophecy.
3. He must know the Bible well, so that he knows what it teaches on *any* subject.
4. He must have a good memory, so that he knows where to find verses on any topic.
5. He should have good communication skills so that he can hold people's attention for the entire length of his message.

If anyone doesn't have all these five qualities, then it is better for him to use notes when preaching.

Finally, Jesus never shouted while preaching (*Matt.12:19*). Nor did He say "Hallelujah" every now and then in His messages. I have followed Jesus' example here too. When preachers shout in their preaching, it is *not* the fire of the Holy Spirit usually, but just their soulish attempts to manipulate people; and their "Hallelujah"s are merely a habit or "*time-fillers*", while they are thinking of what to say next!

In my preaching, I sought to get people to obey God's Word and to take up the cross daily and follow Jesus – and not just to move them emotionally for a short time. The goal of my preaching has been "*to present every man perfect in Christ*" (*Col.1:28,29; 1 Tim.1:5*).

CHAPTER 41

God's Time Is The Best Time

“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven” (Eccl.3:1)

Even though man's need existed from the time of Adam's sin, yet the Son of God waited in heaven for 4000 years before He came to save man. But He came *“at the right time” (Gal.4:4 - TEV)*. And after coming to earth, He still waited 30 years in Nazareth for *“His hour to come”*, before He began His preaching ministry (*Jn.2:4*).

There is a *right* time for us too – for every ministry.

By 1995, I had preached God's Word in most of the states in India, but I had never visited Mizoram. An evangelical church in Aizawl (capital of Mizoram) arranged a series of special meetings in October 1995 to celebrate 100 years of Christianity in Mizoram. They made enquiries for a speaker and someone (whom they respected) told them that if they wanted to hear the whole truth, they should invite me!! And so they invited me and I went.

When I reached Aizawl, it was raining heavily. I immediately thought of Elijah who asked the Lord to stop the rain 3000 years ago. And I prayed that the Lord would stop the rain here for the next seven days, so that people could come to the meetings more easily. I remembered that Elijah also prayed saying, *“Lord, let these people (who respect Baal's prophets and consider me to be a false prophet) know that I am Your servant” (1 Kings 18:36)*. And I prayed Elijah's second prayer as well – I didn't know why!

The Lord answered my first prayer and the rain stopped completely before the first evening meeting started; and we had clear weather for *all the seven days of the meetings!*

It was only after the meetings were all over, that I heard this amazing story: The elders of this church had wanted to invite me many years prior to this. But they had been told that I was teaching heresy, and so they had not invited me earlier. It had rained heavily in Aizawl for seven consecutive days *before* the meetings. When the church-elders saw the heavy rain, they began to wonder whether God was telling them thereby that they had invited the wrong preacher for their meetings!! The senior elder told me (after all the meetings were over) that on the day *before* the meetings were to begin, he had prayed publicly at their morning prayer-meeting saying, *“Lord, if Zac Poonen is really Your servant Whom You have chosen to speak at our meetings, then give us a sign by stopping the rain and giving us clear weather at the first evening meeting.”*

God gave those believers *more* than the sign that they had asked for: The weather was clear for all seven days of the meetings. And to confirm that it was God Who had done that, it began to rain heavily once again, the very next day *after the meetings were all over!!* There was also a two-day strike in Aizawl after the meetings were over, that paralyzed life in the city. But God had restrained both the forces of nature and the forces of rebellion during the seven days of the meetings!! Then I understood why I had prayed Elijah's second prayer too. God answered that as well!

I preached 15 messages on *“Perfect Freedom in Christ”* and *“True Discipleship”*. And while there was no *physical* rain during the meetings, there was plenty of *spiritual* rain at all the meetings!! About 600 people were present at the first meeting. This number increased to about 1200 on the last day, with many people standing outside the building on the main road. The Holy Spirit moved mightily. On the last two evenings, I asked all those who wanted to repent and surrender everything to the Lord, and who wanted to take

up the cross daily and follow Jesus, and who wanted the baptism in the Spirit, to stand up. Hundreds stood up and I prayed for them.

The church-leaders were excited to see the work the Lord had done. One of them told me that they had heard sugar-coated words from other preachers in the past, but now they had heard the pure unadulterated truth of God, for the first time.

I understood then why the Lord had allowed people to warn these church-leaders against me earlier. If they had *not* been warned against me, they would have invited me to Aizawl *ten years earlier, when the ground in the hearts there was not ready*. And then my labour would have been wasted. God saw that – and so He allowed the church-leaders to be prejudiced against me for ten years. Once the ground in those people’s hearts was ready, God removed their prejudice and took me there – at the right time – to proclaim the full counsel of God.

I have seen God working in a similar way in other places too.

Everyone needs to hear the full gospel – but people’s hearts have to be prepared to hear it. The ground has to be ploughed up in their hearts before the seed can be sown. And God alone knows when any group of people is ready to hear His full truth. If we live in the will of God, He will lead us to such people *at the right time*. God’s ways are perfect. It is best therefore to accept His timing in all our movements and *to give thanks for opposition* too – for even that can only fulfil God’s purposes. God uses what Satan does, to further His purposes. Thus He makes a fool of Satan again and again.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 42

God Adds To The Church

Two proofs that God is still working in a church are that He *adds* wholehearted disciples to it and *removes* from it those who are not interested in following the Lord. We read in the Scriptures:

“The Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (In those days, only those who accepted the message of discipleship were considered “saved”) (*Acts 2:47*).

The Lord says, “I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and leave among you a humble and lowly people. The LORD your God (will then be) in your midst and rejoice over you with shouts of joy” (*Zeph.3:8-17*).

We have seen our heavenly Father work in *both these* ways in our church, from the very beginning.

In a country like India, with over one billion people, to find those who want to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ is like looking for a few needles in a hundred thousand haystacks!! We can spend a lifetime searching through these haystacks, and even then find only one or two needles. But a more efficient method would be to put very powerful magnets outside these haystacks. The needles will then be drawn out of the haystack by the magnets – with minimum effort! This is the best and most efficient way of finding those who are wholehearted. And this is the way God wants it done too. Jesus said that others would know that we are His disciples when they see our love for one another. (*John 13:33-35*). It is our witness as a church that is to *draw* others to us.

And so we wanted our church (and all the churches the Lord planted through us) to be such magnets that drew disciples out of the thousands of haystacks in India – and elsewhere too.

Since the Lord commanded us to make *disciples* (and not converts) (*Matt.28:18-20*), we preached the *three* conditions of discipleship (mentioned in *Luke 14:26-33*) from the very beginning, – loving Jesus supremely, dying to Self daily and being free from attachment to the material things we possessed. We wanted to gather together in our churches only those who were interested in fulfilling these conditions of discipleship.

So we prayed that the Lord would add to our number those who wanted to be such disciples. *We never invited* anyone to join our churches. We wanted people to join us their own. *In all these years, since 1975, I have never invited a single person to become a member of any of our churches.* We have received only those who came to us *entirely on their own*. We believed that the Lord would send to us those whom *we* were called to shepherd and minister to. It is *the Lord Himself* Who adds people to His church. Jesus said, *“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”* (*Jn.6:37*). We believed that this would be true of us as Christ’s Body on earth too.

The Lord used amazing ways to *add* disciples to us. Here are some examples.

In a nearby country, there was a war that led to many people having to leave everything and to flee with their families in little boats. Some of those boats sank in the sea and many drowned and died. But some survived and reached the shores of India. The Indian government housed these refugees in a camp. Two of our churches were located near this camp. So some of our brothers from those churches visited these refugees (who were unconverted nominal Christians) and shared the gospel with them. As a result, a

number of them were born again. Our brothers then visited them regularly in their camp and established them as a church. They also attended a number of our conferences in Bangalore and elsewhere, for about two years. Their eagerness to share their testimony was so great that they would rush to the pulpit at our conferences and testify boldly. Our other church-members hardly got a chance to testify when they were there!! We were all challenged by their zeal. In one conference, after I had spoken about how the Bible taught that wives should submit to their husbands, as the church is to Christ, one newly-married wife from among them, wept and prayed to the Lord and begged Him to give her grace to be a submissive wife right from the beginning of her marriage. Never in my life had I heard a wife weep and pray so fervently with such a request!!

After about two years, the Indian government decided to send them back to their homeland. But by then, these believers had been well established in the faith and we could appoint three among them as elders, before they went back. So God timed their stay in India perfectly. Some time after they returned to their homeland, there was war again in their area, and they were dispersed into three different areas. But amazingly, each of these three groups had one of the elders we had appointed among them! So they could function as three churches under the leadership of those elders. Many others were also added to these churches through their witness there. One of our brothers visited them a few times and had meetings among them and encouraged them.

In another small town, there was not a single church there, since the time of Christ. One of our brothers was transferred there for his official work. He witnessed to others while he lived there and the Lord saved a number of people. He and another brother (from one of our churches) laboured together in this town, and in a few years a fine church was established there – the first one in that town in 2000 years. Very soon thereafter, we appointed elders to lead this new church. In a few years, this church grew further and reached out to the surrounding areas and two more churches were planted in those places. We have had conferences there regularly now for some years, when more than 1200 people gather together to praise the Name of Jesus.

Another one of our brothers decided to settle down in a new place, to start a small business there. Here too, there was not a single church since the time of Christ. Through this brother's witness there, some became disciples and there is a fine church there today – for the first time in 2000 years.

The greatest miracle however, that God has done in our midst during the last 25 years, is *not* the planting of churches where none existed for 2000 years, but the raising up of godly elders to lead the many churches. To find spiritually-minded leaders who are willing to serve and shepherd God's lambs and sheep, without any payment whatsoever, is an amazing miracle in a country like India – where most Christian workers are salaried workers – with the money coming mainly from foreign sources. God however, has sent us men who have served in our churches as elders and shepherds, freely – for decades now. Because we don't pay any elder a salary, we have been protected from many "*Christian racketeers*" who would have joined us otherwise. This is the problem that many other Christian churches and organizations are facing today.

Our magnets scattered across the country have drawn some fine and genuine needles out from the haystack. We hope to draw many more in the days to come.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 43

God Removes From The Church

In the last chapter, we saw how God adds to the church.

God also *removes* from the church “*the proud, exulting ones*” (*Zeph.3:8-17*).

The apostle John saw this happening in his day. He said, “*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they are not of us.*” (*1 John 2:19*).

The elders of each church determine what spiritual standard they want to maintain in their church. Churches that have *no* standards of holiness will not have anyone leaving them. But churches that desire to live by the standards that Jesus taught, will find as Jesus Himself found, that many will leave them. And we have seen this happening in our midst too.

Those who left our churches first of all were the rich and the mighty who were offended because they did not receive the preferential treatment in our midst that they were used to receiving in the world and in other churches. It was *not* their wealth or their position that hindered them from becoming disciples of Jesus, but their *pride* in these things. We never cared for anyone’s earthly wealth or position. We honoured only those who were humble and Godfearing – whether they were rich or poor (*Psalms 15:4*).

Some others left us because they wanted to become elders in our churches – and were *not* appointed as elders! And some who were appointed as elders, left us when they were asked to step down from eldership, because of their unfaithfulness to their charge. Some of them wanted to make money through their preaching abilities (*1 Pet.5:2*) – and we are commanded to stay away from all who preach the gospel to make money (*1 Tim.6:3*). Others ruled over the flock as lords (*1 Pet.5:3*). And some of them attached people to themselves and not to the Lord (*Acts 20:30*)! God replaced all these elders with better men and thus confirmed to us that it was He Himself Who had removed them.

Others left us because they wanted to be connected with some *rich, Western* church – and not to a *poor Indian* church like ours. Most Indian Christians believe that Western Christians are spiritually superior, and so they are abjectly subservient to them. Many churches in India never have any special meetings without at least one American or European preacher as their *main* speaker. Only thus can they attract people to their meetings! We however, treated people of *all races* as our equals and sought to draw people to our churches by the *anointing of the Spirit* and the *message* we preached – and not by the *colour* of the preacher’s skin!! Many Indian Christians latch on to Western groups for the sake of financial gain and to get free trips to the West!! We stood against all such “*seeking of one’s own*”.

Then there were a number who left us because they felt that the standard of holiness we preached was *too high*! We preached discipleship, the baptism of the Holy Spirit (and His gifts), victory over all conscious sin, the sermon on the mount (*Matthew Chapters 5,6 and 7*), pressing on to perfection, walking as Jesus walked, a godly family-life, taking up the cross daily, separation from the spirit of the world, freedom from the love of money, fasting and prayer, forgiving everyone from the heart, loving others as Jesus loved us, building the local church as Christ’s Body, etc., Such preaching stumbled a number of people and so they left us. But this did not disturb us – for we knew that many were offended with Jesus’ message too, and had left Him (*Jn.6:60,66*). But it did amaze us that Christians who chose the best schools for their children’s education and the best

hospitals for their medical treatment, chose churches with *low* standards of holiness for their *spiritual* fellowship. This only proved that they valued earthly things more than spiritual things and their bodies more than their souls.

But we were more amazed to see that some who had *no desire for a godly life* still chose to *stay* in our churches. We discovered however, that they stayed on, only because they found a good atmosphere in our midst for their families. Our church was like a good *club* that charged no membership fees!! And so a number of “*Babylonian*” Christians still stayed on in our churches. Jesus had a Judas Iscariot in His church too!

We sought, however, to maintain a high standard *among the elders* in our churches, with frequent meetings and conferences designed specifically for them. God raised up some fine men to be elders in our churches. Many of them were not eloquent preachers, but they sought the glory of Christ and had a genuine concern for the welfare of God’s people (*Phil.2:19-21*). If we could not find even one such brother in a place, we would not start a church there – for without a godly shepherd, we realized that the sheep would only go astray.

As we look at our churches today, we see that we are still far short of what God wants us to be. But we are pressing on to perfection and we seek to maintain the standard of holiness that Jesus taught – irrespective of who joins us or who leaves us.

The church is God’s dwelling place – just like the tabernacle was in the Old Testament. That tabernacle had three parts – outer court, holy place and most holy place. In the outer court, great numbers of people crowded around the altar and the laver (symbolizing forgiveness of sins and water-baptism). In the holy place however, the number was much smaller. There, the lampstand, table of bread and altar of incense symbolized the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the study of God’s Word and prayer. But into the most holy place, *no-one* could enter, in Old Testament times. It is this sacred area that is open today for all who seek *fellowship* with God, who *surrender* their all to Him, and who seek to *worship* Him in spirit and in truth.

These three parts of the tabernacle represent three circles of intimacy with God. And every church (including ours) consists of people who choose to live in one of these three areas. The overcomers however are the ones who choose to live in the most holy place *all the time*, and who will therefore remain faithful to the Lord until the end. They are the ones who constitute the real strength of our churches – and of every church.

CHAPTER 44

The New Covenant Pattern Of Ministry

Right from the beginning of our work in India, we decided that we would follow the pattern found in the New Testament in every aspect of our ministry – *and not what we saw in the churches around us.*

In the first century, the Lord used *apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers* to build His church (*Eph.4:11*). We prayed that we would have all these five ministries to build the church in India in our day as well.

Apostles: *Apostles* were those who planted churches and appointed their elders (*Acts 14:23*). They were spiritual fathers to the elders and guided the churches that they planted. They did not make their churches into a denomination, but allowed each church to be self-governing.

We did not see any apostolic ministry in most of the churches around us. What we saw among them mostly were *two* man-made systems of church government:

(i) The *pyramid* system. This was a centrally-controlled system headed by a Pope or a Superintendent or a President, who had bishops under him, who in turn had priests or pastors under them who ran the churches. In many of these churches, the higher posts were all filled by election! This hierarchical pattern imitated the business world *exactly*.

(ii) The *independent* system. In this system, each church was totally independent and answerable to nobody. An elected board would invite a man with a Bible-college degree to be its salaried pastor. After a few years this pastor would discover a larger church where he could get a better salary – and he would move there. Then the board would advertise and find another pastor for their church!!

In both these systems, there were no spiritual fathers – only elected and paid leaders. We rejected both these man-made systems and chose to follow the *apostolic* pattern described in the New Testament.

Prophets: *Prophets* (*1 Cor.12:28*) were those whose ministry revealed the secret sins and failures in a church and who could prescribe the remedy as well (*1 Cor.14:25*). Their ministry was to challenge, encourage and build-up the church (*1 Cor.14:3*). But such prophetic ministry was rarely seen in our day. What we did see were *false* prophets who deceived the believers by *pretending* to predict their future (like fortune-tellers do). The Lord protected us from such deceivers and gave us *genuine* prophetic ministry in our midst.

Evangelists: *Evangelists* were those who brought people to Christ *and added them to the local church*. But in our day, we saw the emphasis on “*evangelistic crusades*”, where those who came to Christ were *not* being gathered together and built up into local New-Testament churches. Most of the conversions recorded in the book of *Acts*, came through *personal* evangelism. And God gave us some outstanding personal evangelists, who not only brought people to Christ but added them to the local churches as well. We also urged our brothers and sisters to pray that the Holy Spirit would lead them to those around them who were seeking for a God-fearing life. The Lord answered those prayers and added many disciples to our churches. We were about four families when we first met in my house in August 1975. But God added many thousands to us thereafter, from all parts of the world – and most of this was through personal evangelism.

Shepherds: The *shepherd* (translated as “*pastor*” in *Eph.4:11*) is a *gift* given to the church – and not the title of the leader of a church (as in churches these days). The leaders of the New Testament church were called *elders* – *not* pastors – and there was always more than one elder in every church. So we decided that every church that the Lord planted through us, would have at least two *elders*. At times, we had to wait for some time before we could find men who qualified to be elders. But gradually, the Lord gave us godly elders to lead each church. But we needed *many* shepherds (pastors) in every church (besides the elders) to help in shepherding the flock. Jesus’ example showed us that one man could effectively shepherd only 12 adults. So a church with 120 people would need at least 10 shepherds (pastors). God gave us many brothers with a shepherd-heart to care for the lambs and sheep, but we have not attained the proportion of 1 shepherd for 12 people as yet.

Teachers: The *teacher* in the New Testament had the task of teaching believers “*to do everything that Jesus had commanded*” (*Matt.28:20*). They did not expound the Scriptures *academically*. Their teaching was always *practical* and designed to lead people to obedience to our Lord’s commands – commands such as “*Love all your enemies, Forgive everyone, Don’t lose your temper. Don’t lust after women. Don’t seek man’s honour, Don’t love money*”, etc., (*Matt.5:22-44; 6:1-24*). We *never* heard any teaching on these truths in most of the churches around us. But God gave us teachers who taught the believers how to obey such commands of the Lord.

Financial support for workers: In the New Testament, the Lord’s servants were *supported* financially in *two* ways: Some were supported by the gifts of believers, while others like Paul *supported themselves*. But in India, almost *every* Christian worker was either a salaried worker of a church or supported by gifts from believers. So we saw a great need for *some* workers in India *to support themselves* and thereby demonstrate the *second* method of support found in the New Testament – and thus ***restore the balance***. So I decided to support myself and to serve the churches in India *freely*. I also decided that I would not receive any royalties for my books and audio-tapes that our church published. I encouraged my fellow-elders also to follow my example. The amazing miracle we have seen is that we now have more than 70 elders in the churches in India, who have been serving the Lord freely for many, many years. And some of them are serving in India’s poorest villages.

Reports: The New Testament contains many letters written by the apostles. But they never gave any reports about their work in those letters. Nor did they ask for any money *to support themselves or their ministry*. But almost every Christian organization (that we knew) sent out reports of their work regularly – and brazenly asked people for money. We decided to follow the example of the apostles – and *never* to send out any reports or photographs of our work, or to hint about our financial needs to anyone but our heavenly Father. We have followed this policy from the time we started the work in 1975 – and God has abundantly supplied all our needs. Paul shared the reports of his labors only with his fellow-workers – and we have done likewise.

Fellowship: Fellowship and unity among His disciples was the primary burden of Jesus’ prayer in *John 17*. And this was the goal of the apostles too. Most of the churches around us however emphasized *activity* – meetings and more meetings – and *not* fellowship and unity. We valued meetings. But we felt that fellowship was *more important*. So we organized picnics and other functions, at which we got to know each other better. We played games at these picnics with our young people and children and thus deepened our fellowship with each other. Thus we built a depth of fellowship among us that was precious and unparalleled.

There were many other areas like this, where we did things differently from the churches around us. It was a battle to pioneer these new ways of doing things and to return to the practices of the New Testament. Satan opposed us vehemently and many Christians criticized us. But God was with us – and that was all that mattered.

CHAPTER 45

The New Covenant Message

When we first started gathering together as a church, we did not know victory – either in our personal lives or in our home lives. When we looked at other believers, we found that they too were in the same condition. So we could not turn to any of them for help. So we fasted and prayed frequently as a church and sought God for an answer. We spent most of the public holidays in fasting and prayer. Gradually God began to reveal truths to us about *the new covenant* from His Word that we had never known before. As we began to understand these truths, we became more and more liberated – and our lives and our homes were *gradually* transformed.

I felt a responsibility then to proclaim these truths to others. It became clear to me that God was calling me to emphasize those truths in the Bible *that other Christians were not preaching*. So I listened carefully to what others around me *were* teaching. Thus I discovered what I was called to *emphasize* in my teaching ministry.

The Full Gospel: I heard some preachers using the expression “*the full gospel*”. But when I compared what they taught with Scripture, I found that they were not preaching the *full* gospel at all. In *Hebrews 4* the Holy Spirit describes “*the gospel*” (*verse 2*), as “*entering into Canaan*” and not just “*coming out of Egypt*”. I also read there that *God’s people* were to enter into a “*Sabbath rest*” of victory (*verse 9*). So I saw that the message of *forgiveness* of sins was only *half* the gospel. The full gospel included *overcoming* sin as well (slaying the giants in our flesh). As such a life *gradually* became a reality to me, I began to preach the *full* gospel.

Repentance. Most evangelists were preaching faith in Christ as the *only* requirement for forgiveness of sins. Repentance from sin was hardly being preached at all. And even where repentance was mentioned, the root of sin was not being clearly defined as *selfishness*, *self-centredness* and *wanting one’s own way*. So people did not know what exactly they had to hate and what they had to turn away from. I saw that my calling was to explain the root of sin clearly so that everyone would know *what* they had to repent of.

Discipleship: Most converts were *not* being taught that they had also to become disciples of Christ. The three conditions of discipleship (that Jesus laid down) were not being explained: (1) Loving Jesus supremely (above all family members); (2) taking up the cross (dying to Self) daily; and (3) forsaking all that we *possessed* (not being attached to material possessions) (*Lk.14:26-33*). This therefore became a major emphasis in my preaching.

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit. Almost every group that preached the baptism in the Holy Spirit taught that its initial evidence was “*speaking in tongues*”. But I saw that most of those who taught this were worldly-minded and lovers of money. At the other extreme, I saw some believers who were convinced that all speaking in tongues was from the devil!! But Jesus taught that the evidence of the baptism in the Spirit would be *power* – power to **BE** His witnesses (referring to the way we lived) and **not merely to bear** witness (by what we spoke) (*Acts 1:8*). And so, I proclaimed that. Speaking in tongues was only one of the gifts of the Spirit that He gave to some. Because of my stand on this issue, the ‘*Pentecostal*’ folk labeled me as ‘*Brethren*’. And the ‘*Brethren*’ folk labeled me as ‘*Pentecostal*’!! I was quite happy to be equidistant from both these extremes.

Mercy And Grace. For many years as a believer, I had considered *mercy* and *grace* to be the same thing. But I discovered one day that “*mercy*” referred primarily to the

forgiveness of sins, whereas “*grace*” referred to the power that God gave us to overcome sin and the trials of life (*Heb.4:16; Rom.6:14; 2 Cor.12:9*). And this ‘*grace*’ came through Christ (*Jn.1:17*) and became available only after the Holy Spirit came to indwell man on the day of Pentecost. This also became a major part of my message.

The Humanity of Christ. While all Christians worshipped Christ as *God* very few emphasized that He was also a *Man* whose example we could follow. Some who did emphasize His humanity denied that He was God when He was on earth. It was rare to find Christians who proclaimed the balanced Scriptural view that Christ was fully God and fully Man. But I saw that “*the secret of living a godly life*” lay in seeing Christ having overcome sin as a Man (*1 Tim.3:16; Heb.4:15,16*). This too became a major emphasis in my preaching.

Money: When we started our work in 1975, the prosperity gospel (that we hear so much of today) was not in vogue. But Christians still loved money just as they do today. Jesus taught that those who loved money *hated God* (*Lk.16:13*). But I never heard a single preacher preach this message. Most churches only taught their members to pay their tithes. But tithing was part of the old-covenant law that had been abolished in Christ. I preached the liberating *new covenant* message of giving *joyfully, secretly* and *voluntarily* to the Lord. Another thing I saw was that hardly any church in India (that I knew of) preached strongly against the evil practice of asking for a dowry in marriages – a practice that degraded women all over India. I preached strongly against this evil practice; and when conducting weddings, took signed certificates from both the bride and the bridegroom that stated that no money had been exchanged between them or between their parents.

Soul And Spirit. This was another subject that was not being preached. In Old Testament times, there was no clear revelation on the difference between man’s soul and his spirit. But the New Testament makes a clear distinction between the two (*Heb.4:12*). Since most Christians did not know this distinction clearly, they were being deceived by the psychological gimmicks of clever preachers and by emotional counterfeits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So I taught people the difference between what is truly spiritual; and what is merely soulish.

The Local Body of Christ. I saw clearly that the final goal of God was to make all His children into one Body in Christ. The New Testament church was to be a *Body* and *not* a *congregation*. In a Body (as in the human body), every member would be connected to the other members and each would have a unique function. Christ *alone* would be the Head and all the others would be *equal members*. I saw that this was the type of church that God wanted to see in every locality on earth. And so I decided to spend my life building such expressions of Christ’s Body wherever possible on earth.

The New Covenant. All these truths were related to the *new covenant* that God had made with man through the death and resurrection of Christ. I saw that the greatest need among believers was for their eyes to be opened to see the greater glory of the new covenant compared to the old covenant. This therefore became the major thrust of all my preaching – and it continues to be so.

These were some of the major truths that God showed me that I sought to proclaim by every possible means – preaching, books, tapes, etc., – to my fellow-believers. My burden was to spread these truths all over India. But God saw fit to spread these messages even further – to people in many other countries as well.

All glory be to His Name alone.

CHAPTER 46 The Mistakes We Made

Just as babies to learn to walk only after falling down often, God allows His children also to learn to walk in the Spirit, only after they fall numerous times. Apart from our Lord Jesus Himself, no man or church ever avoided making mistakes as they sought to walk with the Lord. As a church, we also made many mistakes – from the very beginning. But we decided to acknowledge our mistakes and to learn lessons from them, so that we did not repeat them. Thus our blunders became less and less as we went on.

The apostle Paul made many mistakes too – circumcising Timothy (*Acts 16:3*), shaving his head to fulfil a Jewish vow (*Acts 21:24-26*) and even getting angry with a judge towards the end of his life (*Acts 23:3*). Luke (Paul's close companion) was the one who wrote *Acts*. Left to himself, Luke would not have mentioned any of Paul's mistakes – as is the practice of most biographers. But when Paul knew that Luke was writing about him, he must have compelled Luke to write about his (Paul's) mistakes as well, because Paul did not “*want anyone to think more highly of him than he should*” (*2 Cor.12:6-Living*).

We do not want anyone to think too much of us either.

Social Work: The first mistake we made was to help *everyone* who came to us for financial and material help. We were few in number and poor, but we were generous with what we had – *and very unwise*. In a country like India, there are many who will pretend to be Christians and join a church only to take advantage of its generosity. We helped people with money. My wife prepared numerous meals for visitors and did day-care for mothers who left their babies in our home. Numerous families who visited Bangalore stayed in our home and took advantage of our hospitality. One of those people even dropped our newborn son on the concrete floor once, while tossing him around, as if he were a ball. We served others to show them the love of Christ, hoping that some of them would become disciples of our Lord. My wife and I do *not* regret any of the sacrifices we made. We knew that we had to pay a price if we wanted to build the Body of Christ. But gradually we realized that God had not called us to do social work but to *make disciples*. We also found that almost *every single person* whom we helped thus, left the church as soon as we stopped helping them. That showed us that they had no interest in becoming disciples of Christ, but only wanted financial and physical help. The world is full of people who are looking for monetary help and for free service!! So we learnt our lesson and decided thereafter to concentrate on making disciples. We still help the poor where we can, but we do it more wisely now.

Legalism: The second serious mistake we made in our pursuit of holiness was to emphasize the letter of Scripture rather than its *spirit*. This is a mistake made by almost all who pursue holiness and perfection. We knew that worldliness was to be found in the attitude of our mind and not in externals; but we still emphasized some externals like dress-styles and the length of people's hair, etc., We were influenced unfortunately, by some of the “holiness” preachers who visited us and preached to us. Some of their teachings were good but they were mixed with heavy doses of legalism. It was like eating a chicken curry with a dead lizard in it that could poison us and kill us. In time, we realized that external changes only made people greater Pharisees! Most evangelical Christian churches are either at one extreme of worldliness or at the other extreme of legalism. It was not easy to find the narrow way to life that lay between these two

extremes. But that was what we sought to find. By God's grace, we slowly found it and began to experience what it means to *walk in the Spirit*.

The Inward Look: Another mistake that we made in our pursuit of holiness was to look inside constantly and to examine ourselves and dig out all the dirt we could discover in our flesh – and the flesh is a very deep pit (*Rom.7:18*). Even the songs we sang were inward looking. We hardly ever sang a song of pure thanksgiving and praise to God. The result was that we became gloomy and morose ourselves and hard and judgmental toward others. But God in His great love for us, amazingly removed the legalistic influences and the songs that we were singing, that depressed us. And He led us out into “*the glorious liberty of the children of God*”. We realized then that we are to run the Christian race, looking at Jesus alone – and **not** inside ourselves. It is as we see His glory, that we will see our own need more clearly and readily acknowledge it too. Then we can trust Him to deliver us from those sins. That way, there will be neither depression nor gloom in our lives.

Gifts of the Spirit: Another mistake we made was the lack of a strong emphasis on the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a church, we started out emphasizing the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit. But then in pursuing the *fruit* of the Spirit, and in a *pedulumitis*-reaction to the wild extremes that we had seen among the charismatics and the Pentecostals, and due to the influence of preachers who never spoke about the gifts of the Spirit, we ignored many of the gifts of the Spirit. The result was that believers in our midst did not experience the power and the gifts that the early Christians had. It took many years for us to come back to preaching and emphasizing the power of the Spirit and His supernatural gifts.

The ministry of women: Yet another mistake that many elders in our churches made was caused by their male chauvinism and the prejudices of Indian culture. They followed the Brethren-assembly practice of keeping the women silent. Although women were allowed to pray, they were never encouraged to share God's Word in the church-meetings or to guide and encourage the younger sisters. These elders forgot that under the new covenant “*God's sons and daughters could prophesy*” (*Acts 2:17*). As a result, old-covenant practices continued in almost all our churches for many years and many of our young sisters lacked godly counsel from older sisters and thereby suffered spiritually. My wife had the gift of prophecy. I knew that because I had been blessed by her prophesying myself - on a number of occasions. But I did not want to push her forward in the church. I taught the new covenant privileges of God's daughters in the churches. But it took many years for some of our elders to change their views and to align their views with Scripture. It is very difficult to break free from traditions that have been acquired over a period of many years. Consequently, many young people suffer.

There were other lesser mistakes that we made. But God was gracious to us and we progressed.

All movements decline over a period of time as more and more people start joining it who are not serious about being disciples of the Lord. Elder brothers also can backslide when they experience God's blessing on their labours and become financially prosperous. We have seen this happen in our midst too. We are no different from any other movement that God has raised up through the centuries. So we walk in humility and brokenness before Him and ask Him to preserve us in faithfulness to Him until the end.

God has given us an excellent and fantastically *loyal* group of co-workers, in Bangalore and in other places. And through them, God has built a quality of fellowship amongst us that is unique – a fellowship that has protected and preserved our children and

that has been a foretaste of heaven itself. We have never found anything like it anywhere else. For this we are deeply thankful to the Lord.

Our greatest encouragement through all these years has been that God has given us light continually on our errors and mistakes and the imbalances that we have. The greatest proof of God's blessing on our lives is His giving us light on the un-Christlike areas in our lives and making us Christlike in those areas by the power of His Spirit. This message needs to be emphasized in a day when many Christians are being taught that financial prosperity and physical health are the primary marks of God's blessing.

All glory be to God alone for His mercy and His grace that He has showered upon us – day after day and year after year.

CHAPTER 47

Making Disciples In All Nations

Since it was easier to make converts than disciples, most churches in India made only *converts*. But we decided to take our Lord's command seriously, to make *disciples* (*Matt.28:19*). And so we proclaimed the standards of holiness that Jesus proclaimed in the sermon on the mount (*Matt.5 to 7*). We taught what Jesus taught – that no-one could follow Him who did not die to Self *daily* (*Lk.9:23*) and that anyone who loved money could not love God (*Lk.16:13*).

God has a particular calling *for each church*. Our churches were raised up by God *not* to do missionary work among the unreached – because many thousands were already doing this good and necessary work in India. He called us to do what was *not* being done by the others – to make the converts into *disciples*. He told us to teach believers those Biblical truths that other preachers were *not* teaching, to lead them into new-covenant life (the new wine) and then to build them together in new-covenant churches (the new wineskin). Many believers criticized us for not engaging in evangelism, but we stuck to our calling. We knew that all parts of the Body do not have the same function. The hand takes food from the plate and puts it into the mouth (a picture of evangelism), while the kidneys spend all their time just purifying the bloodstream and maintaining the balance of chemicals in the blood (a picture of purifying believers and making them balanced). We stuck to our God-given calling as “*kidneys*” in the Body.

We also followed the financial principles found in the New Testament: We never paid any of our church-elders a salary. Every elder had to support himself or trust the Lord for his needs, just like the apostles and elders in the New Testament. And like the apostles, we also never made our financial needs known to anyone.

Most Christian work in India is heavily dependent on Western money and this is why so much of Indian Christianity is so shallow. God's work cannot be done through dependence on money. So we decided not to join any *foreign* organization. We decided to depend on the Holy Spirit *alone*.

We knew that if we followed these New Testament principles, our growth would be *very slow*. But that did not disturb us because we knew that the Lord looked for *quality* in His work and *not* quantity. As the Lord's servants, we were responsible for “*quality control*” in His church. The Lord would take care of the “*quantity*” aspect. And He did that. He added to our churches those whom *we* were supposed to shepherd – and He added them at the right time - *when we were able to handle it*. God's ways are perfect.

We knew that only few would choose this way of discipleship, for Jesus had said, “*The way of discipleship that I have just described (referring to the sermon on the mount – Matt, 5 to 7) is very narrow but it leads to life, and only a few will ever find it. Beware however of false prophets who will come to you in sheep's clothing (= having the right doctrines), and tell you that great multitudes will become My disciples and find this way to life*” (*Paraphrase of Matt.7:13-16*).

We knew from these words of our Lord, that if we proclaimed His standards faithfully, *very few* would join us. We could increase our numbers only by lowering our standards. But we refused to be false prophets! It was *not* right to sacrifice *even one* Biblical principle for the sake of larger numbers.

The *Message Bible* translation of the above verses reads thus: “*Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practised sincerity...They are out to rip you off in some way or other. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. Don't be*

*impressed with charisma; look for character. **Who** preachers are, is the main thing, **not what they say**. A genuine leader will never exploit your **emotions** or your **wallet**.”*

God keeps His servants hidden and tests them in secret before He entrusts a ministry to them. He kept Moses hidden in the backside of the desert for 40 years and tested him before He sent him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Jesus was kept hidden for 30 years in Nazareth and tested before He was sent forth into His ministry. God kept our church also hidden in the same way. For about 20 years (from 1975 to 1995) He kept our church hidden under a covering of reproach, misunderstanding and criticism from other Christians. God tested us to see if we would stand true to Him when faced with such strong opposition from others. He also tested us to see if we would retaliate against our accusers or trust Him alone to defend us and vindicate us *in His time*.

Once we had passed these tests, God began to open one door after another for us all over the world, to proclaim the glorious gospel of the new covenant – that had produced such wonderful fruit in our lives and in our homes. The numbers who responded to these truths were still *small*, but the outreach was *worldwide*.

We did this outreach mainly through literature, cassettes, CDs and the Internet. This was not the work of any one man, but the work of many men and women in the Body of Christ who worked together to spread God’s Word.

Literature: Sticking to our calling, we published books and magazines about those subjects in the New Testament that others never wrote about. God gave some of our brothers a burden to translate and publish these books in other Indian languages – and they worked hard to produce and distribute these translations. Thus the word of the Lord spread far and wide in South India – and many churches were established. About one million copies of our books in many languages have now gone into people’s hands.

Cassettes and CDs: One of our smaller churches copied and distributed nearly 35,000 tapes and CDs of our messages to people in their city. Many who got these tapes made copies of them and distributed them to others in many lands. (We encourage people to do that). In the USA, two church-leaders added our tapes to their church’s tape catalogues. This resulted in about 100,000 tapes of our messages being circulated *freely* by them in many lands. In South India, a mission-leader invited me to take a study of every book of the Bible in his Bible-college in December 2000. God gave me grace to do this in 70 hours – over a 14-day period, speaking 5 hours every day. The messages were recorded digitally on a CD. Thus we produced the first audio CD in the world to contain *70 hours of study* covering every book of the Bible *on a single CD*. This CD also has been circulated widely, and has enabled thousands of believers in many lands to understand the essential message of each book of the Bible.

Internet: As the worldwide web became more and more accessible to people all over the world, we decided to have a website for our church. This website has now become an amazing vehicle to reach people in many countries. At the right time, God gave us an excellent team of technically-skilled brothers to develop and maintain this website. Every week, we send out a short written message and put out a new video-message on this website. Many audio messages and all our books in English (and in a few other languages) are also available on this website. Everything is offered freely for anyone in the world to read, listen, watch or download. This has brought us in touch with many believers all over the world who are seeking for a godly life. In some countries, families who do not find a good church to attend in their hometown, have made our weekly video message their Sunday morning service at home – every week!

All praise be to God alone for what He has done.

CHAPTER 48

Looking Ahead.....

I face the future with total confidence because what is unknown to me is fully known to my heavenly Father. And He has planned every detail of my future life and ministry – taking into consideration every circumstance that I will ever face. Nothing takes Him by surprise – for He is God. And since my only desire in life is to please and glorify Him, I have no fear or anxiety about the future.

The *greatest truth* that God has taught me from the Bible is that *He loves me as much as He loved Jesus (Jn.17:23)*. And so He cares for me *as much as* He cared for Jesus too. Everything in Jesus' life was planned, down to the last detail, from His birth to His death. And God has planned my life also in exactly the same way. *“The Lord saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in His book! How precious it is to realize that the Lord **thinks so much about ME !** (Psa.139:16,17).*

I have a bridal relationship with my Lord (as described in the *Song of Solomon*). This is a very personal, intimate and loving relationship. I live my life *“leaning upon my beloved Lord” (Song 8:5)*. And it is out of this relationship that my ministry flows. My Lord and I go to the harvest fields of the world together (*Song 7:11,12*). I have no desire to go to any place that He does not lead me to. I say, “Lord, You lead the way. Tell me where You are going and I'll come along with You. I will not choose where to go, on my own. And tell me also what to preach – and I will preach it.” And that is how I have served my Lord for these past many years.

My ministry therefore has never been a burden and I have no complaints about *anything*, or against *anyone* – not even against those who have betrayed me, maligned me or sought to harm me. I love them all, because my Saviour loves them all. And He has taught me to pray for those who seek to harm me, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.” My life and my times are in the Lord's hands. People could not harm Jesus or arrest Him *“until His hour had come” (Jn.7:30; 8:20)*. And no person or event can harm me *“until **my** hour comes”* either – and it is my heavenly Father Who determines that hour.

God has never allowed Satan to harass me beyond my ability to overcome, at any time (*1 Cor.10:13*). God has made me *“run against men”* first, and only then allowed me to run *“against horses” (Jer.12:5)*. And every trial that I have faced and overcome by God's grace, has only made me stronger. Thus I have been prepared to face even greater trials. My Christian walk has been an education – and trials have been the means by which God has promoted me to a higher class each time! God's grace has been sufficient in every situation I have faced thus far. And it will be sufficient for me in the future too. Thus I will complete my spiritual education on earth.

The Lord has given me a specific ministry to fulfil in his Body – primarily, to preach those particular Biblical truths that others are *not* preaching *and* also to expose the un-Scriptural and un-Christlike practices prevalent in Christendom today. And by God's grace, I shall fulfil that ministry until the very end.

I know that I will face opposition in my ministry. That is only to be expected. Paul did *not* have a persecution-mania when he wrote, *“**All** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** be persecuted (2 Tim.3:12)*. He was facing reality – and was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted by the world, as He

was (*Jn.15:18-21*) – and Jesus was persecuted more by the *Jewish religious world* than by the secular world. So I know that I will be opposed more by *religious Christians* than by non-Christians. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus’ ministry and criticized Him. Religious Christians will be jealous of my ministry too and will criticize me. Jesus was *accused of preaching false doctrine*. So will I be. Jesus was *taken to court* – by the Pharisees. So will I be – by religious Christians. Jesus’ enemies were the members of *His own family* (*Jn.7:5*). So will mine be. Jesus said, “*Even those closest to you – your brothers and relatives – will betray you and have you arrested. You will be hated, because you are Mine.*” He also said, “*The religious world hates me, because I KEEP TELLING IT that its ways are evil*” (*Jn.7:7*). The only way a Christian can avoid such persecution is by keeping quiet. However the Lord’s promise to me has been, “*Not a hair of your head will perish....No weapon turned against you shall succeed, and you will have justice against every courtroom lie. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord*” (*Lk.21:16-18; Isa.54:17-Living Bible*).

Some years ago, someone told me that a “*Satanist group*” in Bangalore was targeting me in their petitions to Satan. I had known for many years that Satan hated me – because I was a servant of God and a threat to Satan’s kingdom. But I also knew that Satan could not touch me or my family, because I was living under the headship of a Christ Who defeated him on the cross. My family and I are surrounded by an army of angels and we are part of a powerful Body of believers who pray for us constantly.

The Lord told me recently, “*As you were once afraid of Satan, from now on Satan will be afraid of you, because I am with you.*” As Satan was afraid of Jesus, he will be afraid of us too if we walk in the light, because “*as Jesus is, so are we in this world*” (*1 Jn.4:17*). So we do *not* fear Satan at all.

The trials and difficult situations that the Lord has allowed me to face were all planned by Him to enable me to know His power and to experience His deliverance. It is in the face of opposition from men and demons, that I have tasted and seen the power of God in operation. And such experiences have enabled me to strengthen the faith of others too. Effective ministry comes not only through Bible-study and the anointing of the Spirit, but also through facing trials and overcoming them (*2 Cor.1:3-6*).

God has blessed me with an amazing family. He gave me a wonderful wife, who has great spiritual discernment and a very simple lifestyle. She has stood by me faithfully in my ministry, through all these 40 years of our married life. God also gave us four wonderful sons who love the Lord, and who love us and love the church too. And they are serving their generation today, by spreading the truths of God’s Word that they saw in our lives and heard in our church.

God has also given me an anointed team of coworkers, who are elders in the churches in India and in other countries. They do an excellent job of shepherding their churches and have thus relieved me of many responsibilities, so that I can travel to other places and preach God’s Word.

We are living in days of a famine of the prophetic word (as predicted in *Amos 8:11,12*). Fresh revelation on God’s Word is very rare and most preachers are lovers of money. Believers in many groups are getting fed up with the boring sermons and the constant demands for money that they hear from their leaders every week. In such a time, God is raising up prophetic voices here and there, in many lands – and we praise God for this.

We are thankful for the privilege God has given us also, to have a small part in proclaiming the prophetic word of life to believers in many denominations. Some who

listen to our messages are preaching those very same messages in their own churches – churches that would never invite me to speak! Thus God has penetrated every man-made barrier. Our ministry is a very small part of the Body of Christ – but we want to fulfil the particular ministry that God has given us for this time.

My future path may be difficult or easy – I don't know. But God will choose what is best for me and I know He will “*always* lead me in His triumph” (2 Cor.2:14). And since He is always on my side against Satan, He will make me “*more than a conqueror*” in every situation.

Predestination means that my final *destination* has been *pre-determined* by God. That destination is not heaven but *total likeness to Christ* (Rom.8:29). Every day brings me closer to that destination. Praise the Lord!! And if the pathway to that destination leads through a little bit of suffering now on earth, I rejoice in it.

When I see my beloved Lord face to face, I want to hear Him say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”.

Amen!

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