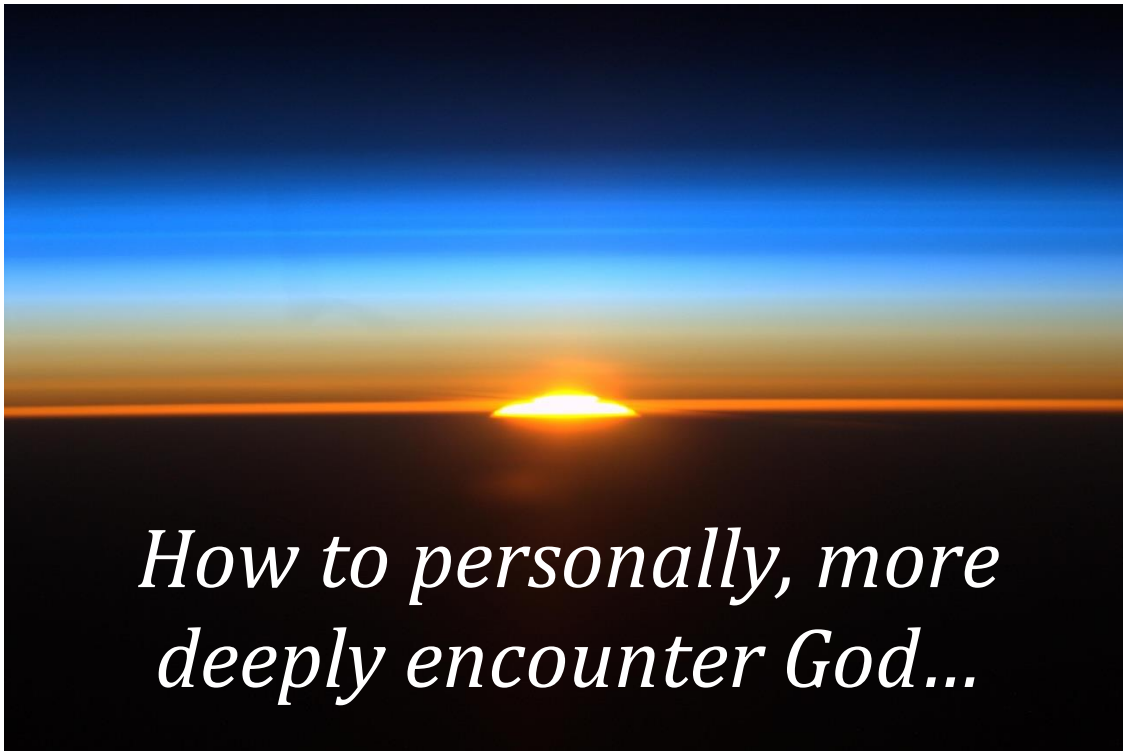


ENCOUNTERING GOD



*How to personally, more
deeply encounter God...*

by David Legge

preachthetnewword.com



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Contents

- 1. The Cost of Discipleship - The Call To Encounter God - 3**
- 2. The Practice Of The Presence - The Atmosphere Of Encountering God – 14**
- 3. Pride vs Humility - The Condition Of Encountering God – 25**
- 4. How To Be Filled With The Spirit - The Energy Of Encountering God - 36**
- 5. Sins, Wounds And Demons - The Barriers To Encountering God - 48**
- 6. Gifts And Fruit - The Outcome Of Encountering God - 62**
- 7. Revival - A Community Encountering God - 73**

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Encountering God - Chapter 1

"The Cost of Discipleship - The Call To Encounter God"

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I want you to turn with me, please, in your Bibles to Luke's Gospel chapter 14. Now, I am following the theme each night: 'Encountering God' - and tonight I want to preach on 'The Cost Of Discipleship', which is 'The Call To Encounter God'. The call to encounter God is the cost of discipleship - so, if you're here and perhaps the title of these meetings has intrigued you somewhat (and there's a lot of 'spiritual junkies' about, it has to be said, who will go from meeting to meeting trying to get some supernatural experience). I do believe in the supernatural, as you'll find out this week, but there is a cost and a price to be paid to encounter God personally - and it is, initially, the cost of discipleship.

We will consider that as we look at the words of our Lord, from verse 25 of Luke 14, and we'll be reading down to verse 33: *"Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it; lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'. Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple'"*.

Let us pray. I want you to do something as we bow our heads, I'm going to ask you to do this every night: I want you to pray for yourself, I want you to pray for yourself now, that God will speak to your heart. Would you do that please? I believe God answers that prayer when it's prayed in sincerity and truth. If you really want to encounter God just now, I want you to pray: 'Lord, speak to me'.

Abba Father, we do come to You in the name that is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ. We in this holy place, in this sanctified moment that has been set aside to focus on You - and in order to, as it were, Lord, draw near to God that He might draw near to us - Lord, by faith we would invoke the very presence of Almighty God. We long now, and ask in Jesus' name, that we will know that we are in the Divine Presence, Lord, that You would descend to us as the dew upon the tender herb, as the summer rain upon the freshly mown grass. Lord, come down, come into our midst, penetrate the atmosphere of this place. Come Holy Spirit, bring the presence of the Father and the Son with You to us, to make their abode now. Lord, we want to encounter God. Lord, we want to meet You. We want to be delivered from a meeting, from going through formalities. Lord, we want to know that God is here. Lord, none of us can work

up Your presence, it must come down - and so, come Lord Jesus, come Holy Spirit. We proclaim and declare the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in this place. We proclaim that He has overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb. We declare now what the blood of the Lamb means and what it does: and we take the victory and take our standing tonight against the enemy in Jesus' name. Lord, we now pray that You will release the power of Your Word tonight, that lives will be changed, disciples will be made in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

I'm sure you're aware that we live in a celebrity culture. It seems to be the dream of many people - especially young people, it has to be said - to be famous, to have an entourage of fans and groupies fawning and fainting at your feet. But such fickle, superficial allegiance never would satisfy the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in verse 25 of our reading, we see that multitudes, great multitudes, went after Jesus - but it appears from the subsequent verses, that we read together and will meditate on tonight, that the Lord wanted to sift out from this crowd those who were really serious about Him, as opposed to those who were just curious or caught up in the mass excitement of the miracles. The Lord Jesus still has the same objective. The Lord Jesus is not interested in quantity as much as quality.

When preaching the Gospel I think we need to beware of two errors, two extremes. The first is: we can give the impression that people need to clean up their lives before they come to Jesus - and that, effectively, is a gospel of works, a gospel of the flesh. Sometimes, if we over-emphasize repentance at the expense of faith, we can fall into this trap - we make people feel that they have to have everything cracked and solved, every sin gone before they come to the Lord Jesus. But the fact of the matter is, our Gospel is a Gospel of grace, and without the unmerited free favour of God, which is a gift, we cannot do anything about our sin without the power of God. It is to those who receive Him, that He gives power to become sons and daughters. So, yes we've got to be repentant and we've got to be willing, but it is God who empowers us to overcome sin. As we say here: we ought not to put the cart before the horse.

In fact, in the previous parable that Jesus told in this very chapter He talks about a great supper, and this man who invited friends to the feast. In verse 17, he says: 'Come, for all things are now ready' - and that's the Gospel invitation. It's an invitation to all people, because Christ has finished the work, and all you've got to do is come. In fact, this man wants his house full of guests, just the way God wants heaven full of repentant sinners. So let's not make the mistake of implying to people that they have to get their lives right before they come to Christ - and I hope that you haven't made that mistake tonight. As Charlotte Elliott said:

'Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me'.

Yet a second error, a second extreme that we can very easily fall into is to give the impression that Jesus wants us to stay the same. We can come to Jesus just as we are, but Jesus calls people not just to follow Him to Heaven, but to follow Him on Earth. You see we are instructed by Jesus not to go into all the world and make converts, we're told by Him in the Great Commission to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You see, Jesus Christ wants to transform the whole person, and therefore the whole person has to embrace Christ and

His message.

Let me try and simplify it by saying that it costs you nothing to become a Christian, but it ought to cost you everything to be a Christian. Can I repeat that? It costs you nothing to become a Christian - by grace are you saved through faith - but it ought to cost you everything to be one, because to be a Christian ought to mean to be a disciple.

A disciple is a follower. I mentioned the shipyard, and some of you may have been apprentices at the shipyard, or maybe you were an apprentice at joinery or plumbing or some other trade - and an 'apprentice' is the same word, effectively, as a 'disciple', it has the same meaning. What an apprentice does is, as a young lad, maybe 14 or 15, he comes alongside a more experienced tradesman - and initially all that he does is, he watches. He looks and he learns from how the old man does it. Then eventually he has a go himself, and in a controlled environment the old man supervises him as he has a go. Maybe he makes a couple of blunders, and maybe he hits his thumb and all the rest - you know about it - but that's the only way that that apprentice can learn. That is what a disciple does - it says in Mark chapter 1 that Jesus called His disciples to be with Him, and then He sent them out to do His work.

He calls us to be with Him, to observe, and to learn - and that requires commitment. It requires commitment to be Christ's disciple. You see, Jesus wants to clean up your life, Jesus wants to cooperate with you - and you've got to be willing, you've got to be repentant, you've got to be involved in this process! It's not enough to come to Jesus as you are, get your sins forgiven, and think: 'Well, that's it!'. If you think of your life like a house, when you give your life to Jesus, Jesus doesn't expect you to renovate it before you give it to Him to clean it from the inside out - He just wants you to give it to Him the way it is. But when you give the house that is your life to Christ, you've got to be prepared for Him to make some changes. He wants to tear down walls, He wants to rebuild, He wants to fix broken things - because being a disciple means we cooperate with Jesus in the work He wants to do in us. Maybe you're here tonight, and you've been a believer for many years, and you, in fact, have been resisting the work of Jesus. You've been reverting back, perhaps, to your old ways. You may walk on the clean side of the road, you may be moralistic and fine upstanding in your community - but, as far as going on with God is concerned, you're static, you're stuck!

Jesus is so candid, isn't He? He tells it like it is. He wants us under no illusions of what it will mean to encounter God. The call to encounter God is to be a disciple of Jesus. There was once a recruitment Sergeant Major in the United States Army, just around the Vietnam war, and there was a crowd of young lads who were at a street corner hanging about doing nothing. He came up to them, he was in uniform with all his regalia, he had his ribbons and his medals on his breast. He came up to those young lads, and he said: 'Do you want to serve your country?'. They said: 'Of course!'. He told them the great glory stories of war and honour and heroism, and of course they all signed up. A number of months later they were lying in the paddy fields, bombs going off around them, their comrades being blown to smithereens - and one turned to the other and said: 'The recruitment Sergeant Major didn't tell us about this!'. Jesus is not like that. When He gives His call to us to be forgiven, to be born again, it is free of charge - but He wants us to understand what we are being called to. At times the Lord Jesus wooed crowds to Himself, but then He began to winnow them. He uses this strong language to thin out the ranks, and He wants us under no illusion that it costs

to be a committed follower of Christ, it costs to encounter God - and you need to count the costs!

Let me herald that call tonight right at the beginning of this week: don't you think you're on a supernatural rollercoaster to eternity this week, of being touched by the supernatural and the miraculous without any cost. So Jesus, in three ways, tells us the cost of discipleship - and I want to bring it to you tonight under three headings. First of all: there is a crisis of love. Then: we are to carry our cross. Thirdly and finally: we are to count the cost of following Christ. The first is found in verse 26, the crisis of love, look at it, verse 26: 'If anyone comes to Me', Jesus says, 'and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot' - that's an emphatic term - 'he cannot be My disciple'.

Now I hope you ask questions of the Scripture, I don't mean in a cynical, doubtful way - but we learn by asking questions, and right away something ought to flag up in your consciousness. There seems to be an apparent contradiction here: Jesus, it appears, is instructing us to hate. 'Hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and yourself' - yet the Ten Commandments, given to Moses by God, says what? The hardest one of them all probably: 'Honour your father and your mother'. Is Jesus contradicting the commandments? He says, 'If you don't hate father and mother you can't be My disciples'. Is Jesus contradicting Himself? He's the one who came and said: 'I haven't come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it', and He said 'Love one another', He said 'Love your neighbour', and He even went as far as saying 'Love your enemy' - and even if your Mum and Dad are your enemies here tonight, you still have to love them! Is Jesus contradicting Himself? Well, let me say, if you 'hate' your mother and father the way Jesus 'hated' His mother, Mary, you'll be doing well. You remember when He was hanging on the cross, He said to the apostle John: 'Behold, your mother', He said to His mother, Mary, 'Behold, your son' - and from that day, John took Mary, the mother of Jesus, into his own home and looked after her as his own mother. So the Lord Jesus obviously loved His mother, Mary. So what is He saying? He's using exaggeration to emphasise a truth. He is really saying that all other loves in our lives must be like hate in comparison to our love for Jesus. Do you understand? He's exaggerating to make us realise that Jesus must be the pre-eminent love if we are going to be His disciples.

In another place, in Matthew 10:37, He put it like this: 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me' - so He's inferring that we will love father and mother, son and daughter, but the point He's making is that our love for them must be like hatred in comparison to our all-consuming love for Christ. It's very simple, and yet so deep, so profound, that most of us miss it: to be a disciple of Jesus you have to love Jesus supremely. Or alternatively, we must not love others or ourselves at the expense of loving Him. Have you had this crisis of love tonight? Is Jesus Christ not only Lord of all, but is He your love of all? I know that's probably an impossibility, perfectly and completely for all of us, but let me ask another question: are you at least aware of that as the cost of discipleship? Are you aware of that crisis in your life where you're wanting your love for Jesus to be right at the apex of your life, top above all?

C.T. Studd, the great pioneer missionary, was afraid that his fiancée might love him more than she loved to Jesus, so he wrote a poem that she ought to repeat herself every day. It went like this:

'Jesus, I love Thee,
Thou art to me
Dearer than Charlie
Ever could be!'.

The point bears emphasis - like Ruskin the poet, who proposed to a Christian lady, and she asked him: 'Do you love me more than you love Jesus Christ?'. He had to admit that he did, and she said: 'Well, in that case, I couldn't marry you'. Ruskin tried again even after she contracted a serious illness, and her answer was still the same. She died not long afterward, but Jesus was still first in her life. Now you might say: 'Boy, this is really extreme stuff here this evening!'. I vouch to say - and I know your Pastor would be faithful in preaching this - but this isn't a popular message, this is not the message to draw in the crowds! This is the message to thin them down, this is the message that sends people packing! People left Jesus Christ because He preached this message - but there must be a crisis of love if we're going to encounter God! It is the call of discipleship.

There could be a disordered love in your life tonight - what does that mean? Your spirit that is meant to bow down in worship of God is bowing down to another love. It could be a sinful love, but it may not be. It may not be inherently immoral. It might be a church, it might be a doctrine, or a basis of belief, or a theological persuasion, or it might be a religious practice - or it might be a member of your family, it might be your husband or your wife, or your son or your daughter, or your brother or your sister, or yourself. We're talking about disordered love, which effectively is idolatry, when our spirits bow before them and they come before the Lord God. 'You shall have no other gods before Me', one. 'You shall not make unto you any graven image and bow down to it', two.

Maybe this crisis of love is because you're looking for love and meaning somewhere else. Jesus is not saying we ought not to love our husbands and wives, and our children, He's not even saying we ought to hate ourselves. We ought to have a certain self-esteem and respect, no one should hate themselves - but we ought not to look to other loves for meaning and self-worth. Some of you husbands are looking to your wives for meaning, and vice versa. Some of you are looking to your children - and this is often the evangelical sin. We don't maybe go to the clubs and pubs, we're not involved in drug abuse and promiscuity and sexual looseness, but some of us are living and worshipping for our families or our careers! That's why we're not encountering God! We wonder what's wrong, we wonder why the heavens are brass, we wonder why we're not getting through to God, and God doesn't speak to us the way He speaks to others - but we are looking to other things, other loves for meaning.

What is Jesus saying here? Listen: 'If you want to encounter God, if you want to be My disciple, you've got to be aggressively violent with every heart tie that keeps you from loving Christ above all'. The worst love of all He mentions last, self - that instinct of self-preservation. Instead of living self-centred lives, we are meant to live Christ-centred lives. Instead of asking the question, 'How every action will affect me?', We ought to be asking, 'How will this affect Christ, His glory, and the extension of His kingdom?'. You say: 'Boy, I came here to get a touch from God! You're so negative!'. I'm not negative, this is not being negative, this is how we know the fullness of Christ in our lives! You see, whenever you realise the love of Jesus for you, Paul said: 'We

love Him, because He first loved us, and gave Himself for us'. Whenever you know the all-encompassing love of God - that's what Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they would know the four-dimensional love; the height, the length, the depth, the breadth of this eternal love. In fact the Bible says Christians are going to spend all eternity just opening up all the different layers of this glorious love, it's inexhaustible! You see, when you get a touch of that, you realise that Jesus can make such audacious claims like this because it's motivated by love, it's motivated by love:

'When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the young Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour content on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all'.

Napoleon Bonaparte understood this principle, he said: 'I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander the Great, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires - but on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force! Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love, and this hour millions of men would die for Him'. Is there a crisis of love in your life? Do you want to be His disciple and encounter God? I'm not saying I love Jesus more than my wife, or my children, but I know I need to and I know I want to! Wait till I tell you this: I know I will love them more and better, if I do love Him over them.

A crisis of love, the second thing Jesus says is: to be His disciple, you've got to carry your cross. Verse 27: 'Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot', there it's emphatic again, 'cannot be My disciple'. Now there are two errors here that people fall into - the first is that they think they have to carry *the* cross. You see this tragically, particularly in parts of South America and the Philippines, some dear misguided Roman Catholic people who are dying on crosses, or at least mortifying themselves and flagellating themselves on crosses, because they believe they have to still pay something for their sins, penance. Jesus cried from the cross: 'It is finished!'. You don't have to pay anything for your sins to be forgiven, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, has been shed and cleanses us from all sin. You don't have to bear the cross, your sins can be forgiven by receiving it by simple faith. Others make the mistake of thinking: 'Well, this cross is some kind of physical or mental infirmity that I have to bear in my life' - or maybe it's troublesome neighbours, or a nagging wife, or a grumpy husband - 'That's my cross to bear!', you hear people talking like that, don't you? That's not what the cross is here that you've got to bear. You see Jesus' cross, Jesus' cross, is what He suffered for righteousness' sake, and your cross is what you will suffer for righteousness' sake also, for following Christ, for standing with Christ. It will be a pathway of reproach, of suffering, of loneliness, of perhaps even death - but here is the whole point: it is voluntary! You must take up your cross, and you must follow Christ.

This is not some illness inflicted on us, or circumstance or situation that we cannot get out of - this is something that we choose for love of Christ. Not all Christians bear their

cross, that's obvious. It is possible to avoid this by living a nominal inconsequential 'Christian' life. You see, when you choose to encounter God, when you choose to go out and out for Jesus, you will experience something of what Jesus did. You will experience ostracisation, you will experience suffering, rebuke, scorn, the opposition and contradiction of sinners - and even satanic opposition, demonic opposition! You see, the disciple will need to follow the road of self-renunciation, of fiery temptation - you thought that if you got to know God a bit better, temptation would just melt away like a snowball? I've got news for you: it gets worse, it gets worse. Humiliation and all sorts of opposition will come your way, but here's what I want you to understand: we choose this. Jesus says: 'You've got to take up your cross' - identify with Christ, and die to self, and suffer for Him - because crosses were made not to live on, they were made to die on! Every morning you wake, if you're going to be a disciple of Christ, you need to go and look in the mirror and say: 'Today you've been called to die to self-indulgence, self-interest, self-promotion. Die to the world, die to the devil, die to the flesh, and live unto God!'

So, have you taken up your cross? Have you? A missionary going into the virgin territory of a pioneer field noted that there was a van that preceded the missionary caravans, and it was a van filled with coffins. It was their own coffins. They knew it was more than likely that they would die on the field for their faith, and they literally were taking up their cross and following Christ. You see, we have all this religious regalia now, and terminology and language - and thank God for a lot of it - but sometimes it obscures the reality of these spiritual truths. What was a cross? It was an instrument of execution. It was tantamount to Jesus saying to you tonight: 'Take up your electric chair, and come and follow Me', 'Take up your hangman's noose, and come and follow Me'.

I hope you're getting this. He's saying: 'Come and walk on death row, and follow Me, if you want to be My disciple'. You say: 'You are making us miserable! You really are! If you're trying to encourage us to go on with God tonight, you're not doing a good job of it!'. Listen: this is the blessed life, this is the Christ life. Jesus said: 'You must lose your life to find it', and it is a heavenly life that we can even know down here - but you've got to be prepared to lay down the life here.

Tom Landry was Coach of the Dallas Cowboys, and he once said: 'The job of the football coaches to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be'. To make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be. Some of you like the lady that goes into the fancy boutique - not that any of you ladies would be like this - and you see a beautiful garment, and you think: 'That's for me!', maybe a wedding or some kind of function, 'That's mine! That's just right for me!'. You imagine it, and fantasise about you wearing it, then after thinking about that for a while you then see this little bit of cardboard, this elusive little thing that hangs on a bit of cord on the sleeve or the hem or something like that - you men know about that - and you just turn around, and then a quick intake of breath! Do you still want the garment? Of course you do! You still dream about wearing it! Are you prepared to pay the price? Probably not!

Oh, you want the blessed life, you want to encounter God. Oh, you want to go on with Jesus, you want to know the supernatural, you want to live a life of daily miracles - well, it isn't a life of daily miracles I'm afraid - but the call to encounter God is to pay the price.

The Cambridge Seven were students who left Cambridge University and went to the mission field. They were radicals, I mean if you saw them today they would be radicals. They shaved their heads, and grew moustaches to look like Chinamen, and dressed up like Chinamen - that's radical in today's terms, let alone way back then. One of them was C.T. Studd, who I've already mentioned, and he gave away his fortune - he had a great inheritance, and he was also a great cricket player. He gave away what's probably the equivalent of about a million pounds in sterling today. He signed it all away, some of it to the Salvation Army, some of it to George Mueller's homes, and the rest of it to the China Inland Mission. He said: 'The stuff went!'. He went to China, and then he went to India where his father made his fortune, and he felt he had a debt to India. Then he went to Africa, and he wrote some scorching booklets in Africa. One of them was called: 'The Jihad of Jesus' - what about that, eh? 'The Jihad of Jesus', another was 'Christ's Etceteras', one that you can still get today is 'The Chocolate Soldier', and in it he talks about heroism as the lost call of Christianity. He says: 'How can we become so hot for Christ that others will be scorched?'.

Then there was another little booklet that he wrote called 'DCD' - have any of you ever heard of that little booklet by C.T. Studd? 'DCD' - I'm sure you haven't, let me explain what it means. The WEC missionary organisation was split, there was coldness in the ranks, there was backsliding among converts - some of them on the continent of Africa, and in the Congo in particular, were going back to witchcraft and drunkenness. Studd got his workers together and he said: 'What can we do? We need to do more to stir up these people!'. They were reading that morning in their study in Hebrews 11, you know that great Hall of Faith, and at every juncture where it said that some man or woman of God suffered for their faith, C.T. Studd banged the desk and he said: 'There must be more that we can do! What more can we do?'. One was sawn asunder, it says, he smacked the desk: 'What can we do?'. There was a man at that meeting called Staniford, he happened to be a Sergeant Major in World War I, and he spoke up and told of how one day in the trenches they were surrounded by the Germans and they knew there was no way out except up and over the top, and undoubtedly they would all be killed to make room for the British troops coming from behind - you just jump over the top and take the risk. As those soldiers contemplated that great act, Staniford said one said: 'Boys, for King and for Country, let's go over the top - and if we die, we die, I don't give a d**n', (a word beginning with 'D' which I'll not say in the church tonight), 'If we die, we die, I don't give a d**n'.

Now that upset a lot of people, that story, but C.T. Studd wrote a booklet, 'DCD', 'Don't Care a D**n' - yes, he did. That might not have been the right wording, but it was the spirit that overcame the lethargy and the schism that was in the WEC. It wasn't the right wording, but it was the right sentiment, and it took over the whole organisation. That heroism, that 'If I die, I die; if I perish, I perish - who cares? It's for Christ and His kingdom!'. We haven't got that today, I don't have that today - but that's what Jesus asks of us.

Do you want to encounter God? The call of discipleship is a crisis of love, carry your cross, and finally: count the cost. Jesus said: 'If you're not willing to do it, you cannot be my disciple'. He told two stories to illustrate what it meant to count the cost. The first was the parable of the tower. Jesus said that 'You need to sit down and see if you can afford to follow Me, just like this builder didn't sit down to account whether he had enough finances and resources to build this tower'. In fact, if you look at verses 29 and

30, Jesus said: 'Lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish''. Do you know something? The world has nothing but contempt for half-hearted, half-baked Christians - they really don't. They know the real thing when they see it, that's why the world is laughing at the church this very evening in the United Kingdom, in Ireland. Then He told a parable of the King, and he said: 'Sit down and see if you can afford to refuse my demands, if you've enough to fight with'. Look at this verse 33, look at this verse, He sums it all up: 'So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple'. Wow! There's a lot of debate goes on about verses that should be in and out of the Bible, I imagine - I hope you don't mind me saying this - but if that one fell out, there would not be too many people would be worried about it, eh? Let's be honest, that must be one of the hardest verses in the Bible: 'So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple'.

Did the Lord know what He was saying? Did He? Did He know what He was asking? Do we know better today? You see, the Lord knew, listen: this is what it would take to get the job done - a crisis of love, people who will carry their cross, and count the cost. In fact the ancient Greek phrase here for 'forsake all that he has', applied to people it literally meant: 'You need to say goodbye to all that you have, or you cannot be my disciple'. Now people get freaked out and frightened about the will of God, and think: 'Oh, here, I can't handle this!'. I'm not saying God is going to ask you to do this, people get afraid of the will of God - sometimes the devil can do it on them, and they think that God's going to call them to the back end of beyond, and there will be no showers and no toilets, and you'll be eating rice for the rest of your life and sleeping with rats. Listen, I'm not saying God is going to require your life, I'm not saying He's going to send you to the mission field, but what Jesus is saying is: 'If you want to encounter Me, if you want to be My disciple, you've got to be prepared to say goodbye to anything!'.

General Booth made a need known in a meeting like this, and a young man responded. Booth spoke with him afterwards and found that he was genuine. He said to the young fellow: 'Make your will, pack your box, kiss your girlfriend goodbye, and be ready in a week' - that was the Salvation Army then. Speaking to new recruits on one occasion, he said: 'I sentence you all to hard labour for the rest of your lives'. Oh, that's very strong, isn't it? Measured against Calvary love, what is it? If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, what sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose. Bramwell Booth, the son of William Booth, was asked what the secret of his success was. He said: 'One day in Nottingham, General Booth knelt down and vowed that God would have all there was of William Booth'. Yet years later, Eva, his daughter, commented on this incident and said: 'No, no, that wasn't the secret. The secret was: he never took it back'.

Some of you surrendered once, but you took it back. Do you want to encounter God? Many Christians felt strongly when this letter that I'm about to read as I close was first read by Billy Graham. Listen carefully, it could have been written by a fundamentalist terrorist today, but it was written by an American college student who had been converted to communism in Mexico. Listen carefully, the purpose of the letter was to explain to his fiancée why he must break their engagement, listen to the letter: 'We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung and lynched, and tarred and feathered, and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain

percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We communists do not have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes, or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor: The struggle for world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life that no amount of money can buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves to the great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, and my mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force that both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad'.

A crisis of love, carry your cross, count the cost. 'If you would encounter Me', the Lord says, 'You must be My disciple'. Let us pray. Now I want there to be silence just in these moments please. I want to give an opportunity of a response tonight. Is there anyone here this evening that has a heart that desires to encounter the Lord in a deeper way. Maybe you've never been saved - well, I'll tell you, anybody who gets saved tonight, I think they'll go on with the Lord, I'm pretty sure about that - because you know what you're getting into! If you want to be saved tonight, you can respond. Repent of your sins and believe, turn from your sins, trust in Christ. If you're a backslider, you've heard the call tonight, it's clear and plain. Confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you - come to the Lord tonight. Maybe you're a believer who has been saved many years, and you've been saying: 'There must be more than this'. You know that there's something wrong, and maybe God the Holy Spirit tonight has put His finger right on the very issue. There has been a disordered love, a reluctance to suffer for Christ, or to give things up - you're not prepared to pay the price. But tonight, you realise that that is the missing part of the formula, that's the missing piece. There is no point - and I'm not wanting to drive anybody away, you keep coming this week - but really you need to move on from here tonight, you need to hurdle this barrier. Is there anyone here in the building that will stand to their feet, and say tonight: 'I hear the call, the call of Christ to be His disciple, to encounter Him. I'm counting the cost, and I'm coming now, whatever the cost I'm coming now'. Stand to your feet just now in these moments of silence, stand here feet. Don't give me this about 'standing in your heart', you need to stand to your feet. Jesus hanged on a cross for you naked, and you can't stand to your feet tonight in a meeting?

God bless you, is there anyone else in the building tonight? You've heard the call - you must all, bar one, be disciples of Jesus. I'm preaching to the converted tonight - I'm not looking just for a response, but I want reality here in these meetings. I'm not prepared to come and tickle people's ears every night, and give sermons for you to go home and say: 'Well, that was interesting' - I'd rather sit at home than do that. If I'm going to be real with God this week, and be real with you, you need to be real with the Lord in this place. Is there anyone who will say tonight, before we close the meeting:

'Tonight I respond, tonight I respond. Lord of all, Lord of my life, I crown Thee now. Thine shall the glory be'.

Father, I come to You this evening thanking You for the passion of Calvary, thanking You that the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive the reward of His sacrifice. I pray, like those early Moravian brothers who sailed out to the unknown, that there will be people here tonight that will cut the ties, whatever they may be. I know that there is a battle going on here in the heavenlies, Lord, in the spiritual realms. I invoke the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the blood over the enemy, and I pray now, Lord, that You will silence principalities and powers that are channelling down right at this very moment, and ungodly, unclean spirits that are seeking to distract and distress and take away from the seed of the word of God. Lord, I pray that You will cut off those influences now, in Jesus' name, and I pray that You will allow people, Lord, now to come and respond to You - even in the pew in their hearts, and say: 'Lord of all'.

For those who want to respond tonight, I want to lead you in a prayer, just say this after me, if you would even take it upon your lips - the person beside you doesn't even need to hear, but if you would just whisper it: 'Lord Jesus, I acknowledge my need of You, and I accept You now as Lord and Saviour of my life, my Redeemer and my Deliverer. I invite You now to be Lord of every area of my life. I thank You that Your blood was shed so that I might be free and cleansed. I commit myself to You now, body, soul, and spirit - everything that I am, and everything that I have. Amen'.

Encountering God - Chapter 2

"The Practice Of The Presence - The Atmosphere Of Encountering God"

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by David Legge

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 27, I want to speak to you tonight on 'The Atmosphere of Encountering God'. These meetings are entitled 'Encountering God', and tonight - having looked last night at 'The Call to Encounter God', which was 'The Cost of Discipleship', the cost, the price we have to pay to go through with God - tonight we will not pack the same punch of challenge by any means, but I have to say to you right at the outset of this message that I believe that this might be one of the most important messages that you might ever hear. If you are a seeker after God here tonight, you're going to hear something that is a key, intrinsic to encountering God: 'The Atmosphere of Encountering God' is 'The Practice of the Presence of God' - the practice of the presence of God.

So Psalm 27 verse 4, just one verse, and then I want you also to turn - you might turn it up now - Isaiah 26 and one verse there also. Now I'm going to read from the version I have here, the New King James Version, which won't be dissimilar from yours if you have the Authorised Version, and then I'm going to read both these verses in a different version - two different versions. The first is the Amplified Version, which just, well it's self-explanatory, it amplifies the meaning of the original text. The second version of the second verse that I want to read is from the old Revised Version from the margin, so I daresay none of you will have that tonight - but you'll know why I'm reading it from these versions in a moment.

Psalm 27 verse 4: *"One thing", David says, "I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple".* The Amplified Version reads thus: *"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek, inquire for, and insistently require: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, in His presence, all the days of my life, to behold and gaze upon the beauty, the sweet attractiveness and the delightful loveliness of the Lord, and to meditate, consider, and inquire in His temple".*

Then Isaiah 26 verse 3, the Authorised Version reads: *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee"*, the Revised Version margin reads, *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose imagination is stayed on Thee"*, whose imagination is stayed on Thee.

Let us pray - and as I invited you last evening, and will do each night, I want you now to pray for yourself that God might speak to you. Do pray that God will speak to everyone in the place, young and old, but I want to ask you: please, ask God to talk to your heart, and to touch your life, as we come in prayer now. Abba Father, we come believing that already we have been aware of Your presence in this place. We thank You for being with us on past occasions, we thank You for the sense that You are here already before we have even arrived - and yet, Lord, we long for You to intensify the

sense of Your presence; Lord, that we might become very aware that You are personally here. So, by faith, we would seek now to encounter the great objective reality of the Living Presence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, Lord, we say: Come to us, abide with us, come into our midst. Oh, send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead us, let them bring us to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle - then we will go to the altar of God, to God our exceeding joy. Come Lord, come Holy Spirit, bring the very presence of the Father and the Son into our midst, indeed into our hearts. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we take authority over every other ungodly presence that may be here, and even in lives - the Lord rebuke you, Satan and your kingdom, and by the power of the blood of the Lamb, and in the name of the Lord Jesus we bind you. We forbid you to operate in this place against the will of God and the word of God. Father, I ask now that You will bind up principalities and powers that would seek to rob the word of God from hearts. I ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, my Father, that You will release the mighty power inherent in the word of God. Come, speak to young and old. Lord, we do not know the needs, but the Lord who is the Spirit, who reads the hearts, come Holy Spirit and meet our needs. May we indeed taste of this great Presence of God in the place tonight and in our lives, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

The great desire of the heart of God has always been to dwell in the midst of His people. He longs to be manifestly present among His congregation. We see that from the very beginning of the book, in the book of Genesis we see that God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. The picture that is there in the Hebrew is that it was late in the day, at dusk. Having done a day's work, Adam would, it would seem to be his habit to meet with God - perhaps over an evening meal - and just converse with God his Creator and his Father. From there we move on, even after the fall of mankind, and we see that God still desired to meet in the midst of His people. He instructed Moses to build a Tabernacle, a tent in the wilderness where He would manifestly dwell in the midst of His people, and they would see it. There would be a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, and God's Shekinah Glory - that just simply means His manifest, dwelling presence - would be visible amongst His people.

Of course, when the wilderness wanderings were over and the children of Israel settled in the Promised Land, in the Holy City there was a more permanent edifice where God dwelt - the Temple. Yet still, God's presence was visibly there. Now, of course the greatest manifestation of God's presence that there has ever been is Immanuel - God with us. The apostle John said: 'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. There never has been, there never will be, a greater manifestation of the presence of God than our Lord Jesus Christ - the very Word of God incarnate. You know what a word is, a word is an expression of the thoughts or the feelings of the heart - and God, His express image, is found in Jesus Christ, His Begotten Son.

Now, of course the ultimate hope of the Christian is the New Jerusalem. We read there from John's Revelation: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'. We read there are also that they shall see God's face - what a day that will be! His name shall be upon their foreheads! The Lamb and God shall be the light of that City, and we will bask forever in the eternal splendour of that Light that shall never fade or die.

Yet the testimony of the New Testament is that the New Covenant believer in Jesus Christ, now, today, can know the real presence of God personally. My challenge to you tonight is: do you know God and His presence in a real way? Jesus, before He went to the cross, was crucified, was buried and rose again, He promised the disciples - He said: 'The promise of the Father, and My promise is: I will not leave you orphans. You will not be comfortless, but I will come to you'. For me, the greatest verse of the Bible is John 14 and verse 23, where Jesus said to His own: 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We', Father and the Son, 'We will come to him and make Our home with him'. It's amazing to think that the Lord Jesus promised, as we go into the world to preach His Gospel, He said: 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'. This was the promise of the Father and the Son, this was the promise of Pentecost: that God would come to be with us, and God would dwell within us.

Maybe you're one of these professing Christians that has struggled for the key to the Christian life. If you go down to your local bookshop, your Christian evangelical bookshop, you'll see reams of literature that perpetuate what they believe the key to the Christian life is. Let me say this to you tonight: I believe that one definite key to going on with God and encountering the living God is to practice the presence of God with us and dwelling within us.

Now some will say: 'But is God not everywhere anyway?'. Yes, God is omnipresent, that means He is everywhere. We cannot flee from His presence, Psalm 139, even if we make our bed in hell, God is there, His presence is even in hell - it's God's hell, you know, He created it, it belongs to Him. The old puritan said that God's centre is everywhere and His circumference is nowhere. God is the God in whom we live, and we move, and we have our being. So, yes, God is everywhere. Someone else will say: 'Does the New Testament not say, and Jesus Himself promise, that 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst' - and so, when the church is met, Jesus is there?'. Well, I'm not sure that every church meeting is where we're met in Jesus' name - but that's a whole other subject - but, yes, this was the promise of Christ. My issue of contention with you tonight is: how many of us, day by day, are actively conscious of the real presence of Jesus Christ, and God our Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit? Additionally to that: how many of our churches have a conscious sense of the Living Presence of God?

You see, we know an awful lot as evangelical Christians, but there's a great gulf between what our head knows to be true, and what our hearts are aware of - what our hearts, and the eyes of our hearts are awake to. Now, why is that? I believe it's because we have not learned to practice the presence of God. I read to you Isaiah 26 verse 3 from the Revised Version, the margin: 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose imagination is stayed on Thee'. Now imagination frightens us, doesn't it? Especially as conservative evangelicals - if that's what you call yourself. It frightens us because we think of imagination as fanciful, fantasy, or fiction - the thing of fairytale and farce. But that's not what 'imagination' means when we read it here in this verse, and indeed the dictionary definition would clear that up. We need to think of imagination rather as the faculty of the mind of the heart, the faculty of the mind of the heart, rather than the faculty of the mind of the head. We Western materialists are experts when it comes to the mind of the head, but we are pygmies when it comes to the mind of the heart - many less-developed countries have better eyes in their heart than we have.

When I talk about imagination, we're talking about seeing with the eyes of the heart. The New-Age Movement espouses visualisation, that's not what we're talking about - and some, even in the church, are seeking to do this; that is, to attempt to believe something to be true in order to make it to become true. That's not what we're talking about. We as Christians believe something is true because it's true! It is right to use the eyes of our heart to see what is true. A.W. Tozer once said: 'The practice of the presence of God consists not of projecting an imaginary object' - and he uses 'imagination' there in the way I cited about fantasy - 'It's not projecting a fantasy object from within our own mind, and then seeking to realise its presence; it is rather to recognise the real presence of the One whom all sound theology declares to be already there'. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose imagination', who has the eyes of his heart or her heart fixed on the objective reality of the universe, the Living God who is.

You see, we are to believe in God's presence - but we must choose to believe this not just with our intellects, but with our hearts; and it is with our hearts that we will encounter the presence of God. No man ever encountered God with his head. Brother Lawrence was a Carmelite monk in the 17th century, and he wrote a classic book entitled 'The Practice of the Presence of God'. This was his very simple experience, even some of these young people could do this - he said: 'I make it my business to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, and a general fond regard to GOD, which I may call an actual presence of GOD; or, to speak better, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with GOD, which often causes in me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them, and prevent their appearance to others'. He lived habitually in the sense of God's presence. Now this takes a bit of effort, admittedly, at first - do you know why? Because we are so present to so many other things, we're so conscious of other things other than God, our focus is on other things other than the objective reality of the Creator of the universe - but when we choose, by faith, to recognise His actual presence with us, then we will encounter God!

Now there are two errors that I want to warn against this evening. Some people, first of all, go about seeking God's presence as if it was elusive, as if it were hard to get, as if it was way up there in Heaven and it must be brought down here to Earth. I know we use language, and I do it as well, we talk about 'God coming down' - but we've got to understand that the presence of God has been given already. It is given to us by grace, but like everything that has been given to us by grace, we must receive it by faith. We must realise it, and come into it, and encounter it - and in that sense it must come to us - but it is by faith in the ultimate reality of what is there, Who is there. So don't make that error of thinking that God is way out there - I hate that song: 'From a distance, God is watching us'. He is not at a distance.

The second error is to only consider God present when there is supernatural phenomenon or miracle. So some people lust after spiritual supernatural experiences, and they only judge God to be with them whenever they see a manifestation of God's presence visibly or sensually. We are not to seek the supernatural or the miraculous as evidence of God's presence - we believe in it, but we take this presence by faith, because God is there and He has promised to be there. We encounter His presence by faith. You see, some people in revival have extraordinary experiences of the presence of God, it is manifest to them in such an extreme that it seems to invade their senses -

but I want to declare tonight that God can be present, and is present, when there is no revival! W.L. Rowlands of the Apostolic Bible College many years ago said: 'In revival God comes down, but we want a God who stays'. We need revival, but I believe one of the chief ways we will get revival, individually and corporately, is when we learn to practice the presence of God who is already with us. Very strangely and ironically, an unbalanced desire for the supernatural or for revival can actually rob us of the practice of the presence of God. Would you believe it!? This must be taken by faith.

I want to talk first of all about some barriers to practising the presence of God, and then some blessings of practising His presence. I want to be as practical as possible. First of all let's look at some barriers to practising His presence. Leanne Payne said: 'If we do not practice the presence of God, we will practice the presence of another'. I want you to really get that: if you do not practice the presence of God, you will practice the presence of another. Three of the most common presences that Christians practice are: practising the presence of sin; practising the presence of self; and practising the presence of Satan.

Let's look at the first: practising the presence of sin. Now I'm not talking about actively engaging in sin - I mean, that's obvious. I mean, if you walk in the darkness, you will not know the presence of God. If you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you, and you will not hear the Lord for that matter - there will be a great barrier between you and God in fellowship. What I'm talking about is being conscious of your sins past, or perhaps being so aware, presently, of the struggles that you have now - which we all have with sin and temptation. There may well be a need in your life for healing and deliverance which you have not had since the moment you first believed. It is true that when we have sinned against God, we need to first become present to our sin, we need to be aware of it and the guilt of it, and we need to repent - but we ought not to stay there. God never intended anyone to stay under His conviction, God wants us to move on into the light, He wants us to look out from ourselves and from our sin, He wants us to look away from our failures and look to God. He wants us to see Christ crucified, absorbing failure and our fallenness - we must not stay beneath condemnation!

Some of you have never moved on from practising the presence of your guilt and your sin. Can I tell you: if you do that, Satan will readily oblige. The Bible calls him 'the accuser of the brethren', and his job is to condemn you. Condemnation never comes from the Spirit of God, conviction does - but if you confess your sin, it's under the blood, and if you still are condemned it's coming from the devil, it's not coming from the Holy Spirit. You've got to look out from yourself, stop practising the presence of the guilt of your sin, past, present, or even the fear of it in the future - look out from yourself and practice God's presence, the presence of the crucified and risen Christ, and be free from your sin! If you're not saved tonight, and you're still in your sins, listen to what Paul said to the Athenians: 'Seek the Lord, reach out for Him and find Him, for He is not far from each one of us'. God is not far from you tonight! If you repent of your sins, the Word of God is near you, if you call upon the name of the Lord you will be immediately saved! Maybe you are saved, and you're a struggling believer, you've struggled ever since you were born again - do you know what you need to do? You need to constantly affirm God's presence within you. If you're born again, God lives within you. You mightn't be filled, you mightn't be baptised, but you might know God is in you when you're born again of the Spirit of God. You need to affirm that presence of God within you, even tonight, if you put your hand upon your breast and

say: 'Of a truth, God is in me' - that's where true being comes from, that's where a true sense of worth comes from. What you need to do is step into the centre of who you are in Christ, recognise who you are in Christ, and Christ is in God - and that is the anchor of your soul. Stop practising the presence of sin, and beware of anything that separates you from that Presence!

A second thing that people practice is presence of self that robs them from the presence of God. Now, when I talk about practising the presence of self, I'm talking about the disease of introspection. Does anyone not know what introspection is? It's looking in on yourself, it's being introverted, it's like looking in the mirror - as we do physically - and hating the way you look, hating the way your hair is, or your ears, or your nose, or the colour of your eyes. When we do that internally, we hate ourselves within. We look inside ourselves and we hate the way we are. Not just 'failures' are like this, not just people who continually stumble and struggle, but perfectionists are like this as well. Are there any perfectionists in the meeting tonight? Those who continually put themselves on their own dissection table - you're never good enough, what you do for the Lord is never good enough. You may need healing from past wounds and hurts, and you need to become present to your brokenness - you do! Don't deny it, don't suppress it - you need it to come to the surface, your own woundedness and your pain - but you then need to look out from yourself! That's what some of you are not doing: you need to look away from yourself, and you need to look to Calvary. You need to look to God your Father, who redeems, who saves, who restores, renews and heals - and you need to stop endlessly wasting your time and energy on yourself! Stop looking in, look out! Look to God and receive His presence within! You see, it's looking out of ourselves that we achieve wholeness and well-being within.

Thirdly, some practice the presence of Satan - not just the presence of sin and self, but the presence of Satan. They are not just sin-conscious and self-conscious, but they are Satan-conscious. Now don't misunderstand me, I think there's a great deal of unbelief in the church of Jesus Christ regarding the kingdom of darkness, the devil and his demons - that's firmly what I believe, and you'll find that out as we go through the week. There is a healthy awareness and a cautiousness, but there is also a paralysing paranoia about the kingdom of darkness. We have to beware of this. Some people are so aware of the spiritual battle that is going on around them, that they see demons everywhere - and that robs them of the presence of God. They are effectively practising the presence of darkness, rather than the presence of God's light. Beware. Corrie Ten Boom, who believed in Satan and the need for deliverance, she said: 'Fear of demons comes from the demons themselves' - how true. Satan wants us to be practising his presence, Satan wants us to be consciously aware, constantly, of the fact that he's around and he is the god of this world and he's coming against Christians. Yes, we need to know it, but we ought not to practice this for it will rob us of the presence of God.

I was in Wales just the other week, and there was an elderly lady - I was touching on this very point - and she called me over, and shared with me how she was reading a book that told the story about a Fellowship that couldn't start its meetings without binding and loosing every conceivable spirit that they thought was in the place. What happened was, their meetings got longer and longer, and more laborious, it took them ages before they could actually start to worship God - and they wondered why this was. They were aware of the kingdom of darkness, but they couldn't understand why they weren't getting through to God, and why it was becoming harder. There was a

man of God who revealed to them, this is what he said: 'Every demon in the area is coming to your meeting, because they love the attention they are getting!'. We need to be careful, we need to be balanced. Satan is real, and I do believe in the ministry of deliverance, and I do believe we need to take the authority that we have over the kingdom of darkness - but we also need to beware of falling into the trap of practising the presence of darkness, rather than practising the presence of God. What we need to do when we are in the battle is to affirm the presence of the risen Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, whom all principalities and powers have been made subject to. He has stripped all principalities and powers of their power, making a show of them openly through His cross. We need to bring people into the presence of God, that's what we need to do.

Let me move on quickly. Those are some of the barriers of practising the Presence, but some of the blessings, quickly. There are eight, and I'll not spend too much time on any of them. First of all: practising the presence of God is the cure for temptation. Would you not love that? I would! It's a great problem in my life, and if it's not in yours, well, you're deluded! You are either dead, or you're deluded. Even our Lord Jesus had temptation, though without sin. Listen to what Psalm 16 verse 8 says: 'I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved' - do you see what the Psalmist is saying? Because I'm God-conscious, whenever I'm God-conscious I'm never sliding into temptation and then sin. He will be tempted, but when he is aware of the presence of God and conscious of it - again, Proverbs 16:6: 'By the fear', or the awe, 'of the LORD one departs from evil'.

One of the modern phenomena that young people, and not so young, are struggling with today is the plague of Internet pornography. Many of you are afflicted by it, many of us are tempted by it - but one of the ways to circumvent it is accountability, and there is software that you can get and put on your computer, and you can have an accountability partner - that's just someone who is able to see whatever you're viewing on a weekly basis. That just severs the power of that temptation, to know that your pal down the road knows exactly what you're gawking at on the Internet during the week. How much more power would we have over temptation, if we knew that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the Earth, and He sees everything that I'm doing, where I am, what I'm even thinking? The practice of the presence of God is a cure for temptation, if ever there was one. The old hymn put it like this:

'I need Thee every hour, stay Thou nearby;
Temptations lose their power when Thou art nigh' - when You are near.

It's a cure for temptation, secondly: it's a cure for fear. I believe there are Christians here, or this would be a very unusual meeting, who are practising the presence of fear. I used to practice the presence of fear, and I have to very strongly observe the practice of the presence of God in order to stop it getting in again. Fear was my problem. You see, when you practice the presence of fear, it is mutually exclusive to the presence of God. Isaiah 43 verse 5 says, God speaks: 'Fear not, for I am with you'. You see, when you fear God, you fear nothing else - all other fears pale into insignificance, they melt away in the awesome fear of God. As another old hymn put it:

'The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid' - finish it...
'But God is round about me,

How can I be dismayed?'

Practising the presence of God is a cure for fear, and some of you need delivered from fear. God has not given you a spirit of fear. Some of you might have a spirit of fear, but God has given you power, love, and a sound mind. Thirdly, another blessing is that practising God's presence is a cure for loneliness. It was Milton, the poet, commenting on Genesis 2:18, who said: 'Loneliness is the first thing which God's eye named not good' - that was before the fall. Loneliness, some of you here tonight are lonely because of the loss of a loved one, or maybe you're surrounded by family and friends, or men and women on the factory floor, but you feel the loneliest person on the face of the earth in your heart. Do you know what the cure is? Practising the presence of God - you will never be lonely if you know that God is with you.

Fourthly: it's the cure for dissatisfaction or discontent. There are so many dissatisfied, discontent people - let alone Christians - in our world tonight. Listen to Hebrews 13 verse 5: 'Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you''. As another old hymn put it: 'I have Christ, what want I more?'. Are you practising His presence, or are you discontented, dissatisfied? Now I know there should be an insatiable desire for more of God, we want that, we want a hunger and a thirst - but we need to be satisfied with knowing that He is with us. He is with us, and He is within us - we need more of Him, we'll talk about being filled with Him during the week, but we know - we know - that He dwells with His people!

It's also the cure for lukewarmness - personal lukewarmness, and lukewarmness in the church - the presence of God. The Laodicean church had that awful experience of Christ standing outside the door knocking for admittance. Christ is outside the door of the church, generally speaking, in the Western world. We need to implement radical steps, practical steps to realise again the presence of God in our churches, and to preserve and conserve the presence of God with us.

Sixthly, practising the presence is also the condition of healing. In Luke chapter 5 and verse 17: 'Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them'. It is the presence of God that will bring healing power, and the New Testament church experience was meant to be this, Paul said: 'If there is speaking in tongues, and strangers come in, they will not understand what you're saying - there needs to be interpretation or they will think you're mad; but if they come in and there is the prophetic word, the powerful spoken word of God, they will fall upon their faces, and they will say 'God, of a truth, is among you!'. The secrets of men's hearts will be revealed and they will know God is in the midst of the church! Vance Havner said many years ago: 'Nothing is scarier today in Christians and churches than the absence of the presence of God'. Moses said: 'How shall we know that we are Thy people? Is it not in that Thou goest with us?'. Henry Ward Beecher said: 'I should as soon attempt to raise flowers if there were no atmosphere, or produce fruits if there were neither light nor heat, as to regenerate men if I did not believe there was a Holy Ghost'.

This is a condition for healing and power in the church. We need to start practising the presence of God in our churches. I'll tell you something: there is a generation that has arisen, now in middle age, now young people, and they have never known a touch of

God in church services - and if it came they wouldn't know what to do with it. I know this for a fact. We go to churches at times and God does presence Himself, as I believe He's going to do tonight - is doing now, but will do at the end of the meeting - and what often happens is, some musicians (I'm not against the musicians, I love you!) but some of them aren't aware that God has come. They start blattering away at the piano, or the organ, and there needs to be a stillness. Or somebody starts waffling in the pew, or gets up and rustles keys or plastic bags, and people are getting up and talking about everything - they're not aware that God has come! The Holy Spirit, as He is dove-like, He goes immediately! We need to learn to discern, to preserve, and conserve the presence of God when He comes into the midst!

Seventhly, this is a condition for holiness - and Ulster has long been plagued by a 'do this and don't do that' mentality regarding holiness, doing good and not doing evil, but holiness does not come that way. Holiness comes through being, it is through being that we do what God wants and don't do what He doesn't want. Being comes only in His presence: 'I am only in the great I AM'. Do you want holiness? You need to practice God's presence.

Eighthly and finally, it is the condition for fruitfulness. John 15, Jesus said: 'If you abide in Me, you will bear much fruit'. Do you know what abiding is? It's just the condition of abiding in the presence of God. What are you practising tonight? Are you practising the guilt of sin? Are you agreeing with the devil, and he's hammering you over the head for it? Are you practising the presence of self? Are you a perfectionist, an introspectionist? You need to look away from yourself, you need to start forgetting about yourself and look to God who is with you and within you. Are you practising the presence of Satan? You see a demon in every teacup - whether they are there or not, you don't need to be concerned about them. You need to know that God is with you, and God is within you, and Jesus is stronger than Satan, and Satan to Jesus must bow. Do you need a cure for temptation, for fear, for loneliness, for dissatisfaction, for discontent, for lukewarmness? Do you want healing? Do you want holiness? Do you want fruitfulness? You need to practice God's presence, and it's dead simple.

I want to tell a story as I close now - even you young people, listen, you can understand this. Children are very good at practising God's presence, because children are simple and children use their imagination - not to imagine things that aren't true, but to imagine what is true. Let me tell you the story, listen up as I finish. It's about an old lady called Jacqueline. By now she had become an elderly woman, and she lived to care for her disabled daughter - she was wheelchair-bound, but one day tragically her daughter died. Jacqueline not only lost her purpose for living, but she lost her sole living companion. Her cottage was in the countryside, and it seemed empty as an eggshell to her. She was so lonely. Occasionally a friend would call or a note would arrive, but most of her time she spent in oppressive on-going solitude. Her health didn't allow her to circulate much, and her best friends were all now gone as well, they were in heaven. One day Jacqueline opened her Bible, and she read Philippians 4 and verse 5, and just four words struck her forcibly: 'the Lord is near' - that's not talking about His second coming, that means He is near at hand. 'The Lord is near' - 'If so', she thought to herself, 'I should be more aware of it! Lord', she said, 'I'm going to pretend that You're here all the time. No, forgive me, Lord, for using that word 'pretend', there's no pretending to be done. Help me be ever mindful of the reality of Your nearness'. That evening as she retired, she said: 'I'm going on to bed now, Lord, will You please watch over me as I sleep'. The next morning, on awakening, she said:

'Good morning, Lord, this is the day You have made'. Sitting down with her hot tea, she read through the book of Philippians again, and underlined verse 5 of chapter 4: 'The Lord is near'. Then she prayed for a longer time than usual, it had to be said. At noon she then said: 'Now Lord, let's watch the news on television together, so You can show me things in this world that I can pray for'. Jacqueline and the Lord watched the news together, and then she prayed for some flood victims in the delta, a newly installed president in an African country, for a man sentenced to life imprisonment. At suppertime, she bowed her head and thanked the Lord for her food - but she said a remarkable thing: she said she didn't feel her prayers were travelling up to heaven, she felt instead that she was talking to someone sitting across the table from her. Gradually her attitude was transformed, the loneliness lessened, her joy increased, her fears diminished, and she never afterwards felt that she was alone in that house - because Jacqueline was learning the presence of God.

Listen to the word of God: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him'. Are you practising His presence? Oh, we know He's everywhere, we know He's where two or three are gathered, we know it up here - but with the eyes of your heart, with your sanctified imagination, the intuitive faculty of the heart and mind that God has given and Westerners have shut down: do you know the Lord with you day by day?

Let us pray. Now, I'm not asking you to use your senses, I'm not asking you to use your sight, I'm asking you to use your spirit - and to some of you that is a foreign statement, some of you may not even be aware that you have a spirit. I'm not talking about the Holy Spirit, I'm talking about your human spirit that God breathed into Adam, and you have got - whether you're saved or not, you've got it. If you're not saved, it's cut off from the life of God, but it's still alive in the sense of a baby in the womb that has not been born but it's still there. You've not been born again in your spirit, and maybe you've even sensed God touching you tonight - you've no idea of the things we're talking about, but there is a sense of reality, that God is real - maybe you have even sensed Him here tonight. Well, listen: He is not far from you, Christ died for you, He is risen, He is here tonight, and He will save you! Young children tonight, He will save you if you come to Him and ask Him, ask Him to be your Saviour - ask Him now, say: 'Lord Jesus Christ, I confess my sin, save me now'. You older people, if you have never done that, do it tonight in the presence of God. Backslider, your sins have separated between you and your God, your sins have hidden His face from you. You need to confess your sins and know the presence of God again.

Maybe you're a believer tonight, and you have been practising other presences - is that true of some of you? Now come on now, let's be real here tonight - is there anyone here tonight that will admit that they have been practising the presence of something other than the presence of God? Is there anyone who will raise a hand here, even as a believer, to say: 'I have been practising another presence'? Praise God, is there anyone else? God bless you. People are responding. This might be the most important message you hear. You need to deal in the presence of God now with any obstacle to practising His presence in your life. Is anyone else here tonight who wants to confess and renounce what they have been practising, that has taken the place of the sweet presence of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself? Is there anyone else who will raise a hand? God bless you. Is there anyone else? God bless you.

Now listen, God isn't just going to fall down on you. You, by faith now, not only must you renounce that false presence that has robbed you of the real - whatever it is - you must receive by faith the reality of God's presence with you and within you. You must choose to believe, and with the imagination, the intuitive eyes of the heart, you must see now God with you - you must see this now, it's by faith. You must see what is real in the unseen - that is faith, the evidence of things not seen. You must say: 'Lord, now I believe that You are with me', even put your hand on your breast and say, 'Lord, I believe that You are within me. I believe that You are with me'. Don't be afraid, get out of your straitjacket tonight and put your hand on your heart - I'm doing it. Say: 'Lord, I believe You're within me, and I believe You're with me, because You have said it I believe - and may it make the difference - and I choose by faith to practice Your presence, now and every day'.

Now, if any of you need help, we'll be here to help, we'll be at the door, we'll be at the front afterwards if you want to remain where you're sitting, or speak to us at the door if you want to chat - we'll be glad to pray with you. I'll be speaking tomorrow night on 'The Condition of Encountering God', humility - the condition of encountering God. Let me suggest something to you: do you sense God's presence here tonight? Do you sense Him with us? If you should desire, I would ask you that you all quietly, as far as is possible - I know there's a mixed gathering of age here, and we're not going to be stern and strict - but if you want, you practice His presence just where you're sitting in the meeting. Even when the meeting is over, if you want to sit I'm sure there is freedom here to do that for wee while.

Father, we thank You that You have come - but Lord, we long for more of You, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We say with David: 'One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek, inquire for, and insistentlly require: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, in His presence, all the days of my life, to behold and gaze upon the beauty, the sweet attractiveness and the delightful loveliness of the Lord, and to meditate, consider, and inquire in His temple'. May that be each and every one's experience tonight. May they encounter God. May we encounter God like never before. Amen.

*Encountering God - Chapter 3***"Pride vs Humility - The Condition Of Encountering God"**

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I want us to pray together now. If you were out last evening, we were thinking of 'Practising the Presence of God' - and if you were here, I want you to do what we talked about last night. I want you to do it now. We have already, I believe, if you're sensitive at all, you will have already encountered a sense of God in this place. Well, we want that to intensify and deepen in each of our experiences - so I want you to become present, even more present, to God's presence now. By faith, lay hold and open your heart and drink in that amazing Presence, just let it take over. I would ask you also, as I have requested on previous nights, that you pray for yourself, that God will speak to you tonight. It's going to be quite heavy tonight, we're going to be looking at a lot of scriptures and it's going to be deep, but I believe it's going to be surgical - deeply diagnostic and surgical, if you will allow the scalpel of the Great Physician to penetrate your heart. So why not open now to Him, and say: 'Lord, have Your way'? So let's come.

Heavenly Father, we come to You again as our Abba Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ - that name that is above every name. We thank You for such a definite sense of Your presence already, without much effort we have known a sense that You are with us - manifestly so. We thank You, Lord, for the graciousness of You coming near. We do not take for granted, and we say with the psalmist that 'The name of the Lord is near us'. You have come to us, Lord, in Your very name, the revelation of Your character. We can sense Your sweet holiness and gracious presence in our midst. We thank you for this testimony that even those in the closet today have been experiencing a sense of God and brokenness as You have come upon them. We praise You, Lord, we say: 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'. Lord, we say we want more of you - we want more! We know that there is so much more, we know that You are the God who is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think. So, Lord, we are looking for the much more, more of You, Father; more of You, Lord Jesus Christ; more of You, blessed Holy Spirit - come to us, we pray, come now, come Holy Spirit, come Lord Jesus. We do declare, not just in song but in word, we proclaim what the word of God says the blood of Jesus does for us. We proclaim to the enemy and the kingdom of darkness what the blood of Jesus has done: it has overcome you, Satan, and it sets us free. We declare that tonight and, Father, we take the canopy of the protection of the blood over us this evening. We ask, Lord, that this would be a hallowed place and a hallowed hour. Lord, we say, have Your way, come Lord Jesus, have Your way in our lives and root out pride in each one of us. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.

I want you to turn to two passages of Scripture, first of all Philippians chapter 2, and then 1 Peter 5. Now, if you haven't been with us - on Sunday evening we looked at 'Encountering God' under the heading 'The Call To Encounter God', which was 'The Cost of Discipleship', the cost of following Christ. Last evening we looked at 'The

Atmosphere of Encountering God', and the atmosphere is 'The Presence of God', and we need to learn to practice His Presence. All these are recorded, by the way, and it would be good, maybe, for you to get some of those. Tonight we're looking at 'The Condition of Encountering God', humility - and so the message tonight is 'Pride vs Humility'. Tomorrow evening, God willing, I'll be looking at 'The Energy of Encountering God', and that is the power of the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, 'How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit'.

Let's look tonight at 'The Condition of Encountering God', humility. So it's Philippians chapter 2, beginning to read at first 1: *"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*.

Then over to 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5: *"Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you"*.

C.S. Lewis, that great author and Christian, said these words: 'Pride is the sin that made the devil the devil'. Pride is the sin that made the devil the devil - and if you know anything of the demise of the angel, Lucifer, the bearer of light, that cherub that had a unique position in the kingdom of God to reflect the glory of Almighty God, to hover over Him and reflect the glory of the Holy, Holy, Holy, Triune God of Heaven: he was not satisfied any longer reflecting the light and glory of Another, he wanted his own glory. Pride is the sin that made the devil the devil. Andrew Murray, in his classic on 'Humility', which I'm indebted to even for this sermon - he said: 'Pride can degrade the highest angels into devils. Evil can have no beginning but from pride'.

So, if you like, pride is the mother of all sins. It is the devil in us that wants to exalt itself, as Lucifer did, to the status of God. It is the attitude of this age, and it has been the attitude of every age, that it is better to rule in hell than to serve in Heaven. Man wants to rule rather than serve. If all of us are honest, we've got a pride problem. We want to be the centre of the universe. There is a story told about the late German Kaiser, whose valet said about him: 'I cannot deny that my master was vain. He had to be the central figure in everything. If he went to a christening he wanted to be the baby; if he went to a wedding he wanted to be the bride; if he went to a funeral he wanted to be the corpse! He always wanted to be the centre of attention'. We must come to this point of honesty and transparency, and say: this is all our problem. Pride is the tyrant within. If you're not aware of it, it's not because of its absence, it's

because of your ignorance. You've got it, you're just not aware of it!

If you are in denial, you've got a bigger problem than you ever imagined. Jeremiah 17 verse 9 says: 'The heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' - and you have been deceived. You must not deny the reality of pride in your heart, it is there! My friend Andrew Watkins gave me a quote today from William Perkins, the Puritan who lived from 1558-1602, who said: 'This is a fruit of pride: to think well of ourselves because we are not proud'. So if you think you're not proud tonight, you've got a bigger problem than you ever conceived of. Maybe you're sitting here tonight, and you think: 'Preacher, you've got it really wrong this evening. You don't understand how I have such an inferiority complex, I'm such a broken person, I'm a failure in life - how could I ever be proud?'. Well, you have not understood pride, because pride manifests itself on a spectrum. One low-end is the dropout, the person who considers themselves a failure - they are filled with pride. Then on the top end of the scale there is the over- or the high-achiever, the person who excels, and pride often motivates them. At the root of both of those problems, the dropout, the failure, and the over-high-achiever, is perfectionism. I think I mentioned this last night - I don't know whether we had any perfectionists in the meeting - but the perfectionist is not just the person who wants to be perfect in everything, and so climbs the scale, but the perfectionist is also the dropout who decides: 'If I can't do it perfectly, I'm not going to do it at all' - and so you bale out. Maybe you're one of those.

I believe the creed of G.K. Chesterton, when he said: 'If a thing is worth doing...' - do you know that saying? His creed was, 'If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing poorly' - and I agree with him! If it's worth doing, you do it - eh? Is that not right? If it's worth doing, you do it. Whether you do it well or not is irrelevant, if it's worth doing you do it, even if it's poorly! A lot of people have fallen into this trap of spiritual perfectionism, another name for it could be legalism, and you've given up because you feel that you don't meet the mark. I hear people say constantly: 'Oh, I'm not worthy' - get over it! You're not worthy! You're a sinner! We're all sinners! The irony is that it's not just the Pharisee with his nose in the air that is proud, but it's the broken sinner who will not embrace the grace of God because they feel they're not worthy - that's pride!

I learned recently, and what a revelation it was, that my sin nor your sin will never keep you from God, because Jesus died for sin, He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, the only thing that will ever keep you away from God is your pride. It will build a wall of shame and guilt around you and prevent you getting to God - or, better, prevent God from getting to you. Do you know something? It is pride that made our salvation necessary - we need to be saved from our pride! The means of being saved was the unique humility of our Lord Jesus Christ that we read about from Philippians 2. You see, the only answer to the Satanic poison of pride is the humility of Christ. As we got our pride from Adam, we must get our humility from Jesus. When you think about it, what else was His incarnation only humility - and His humility began in heaven. He volunteered in Heaven to come to Earth, His humility was there. As He came, He emptied Himself and became a man, and coming in the form of man He humbled Himself - and what was His sacrifice as He died on the cross, only humility, 'even unto death, the death of the cross'. Even in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, it was because of His humility: 'therefore God also has highly exalted Him' - when it says 'therefore', ask 'Wherefore?'. Why has God highly exalted Him? Because He has humbled Himself - and so even His ascension is as a result of His humility.

All Christ Jesus was was humility. Do you know something? He was the embodiment of God, and that shows us that humility is at the heart of Divinity - that is a big statement, and a huge revelation. Humility is at the heart of God. At the heart of God there is a slain Lamb. I'm going to make another big statement: I believe that you need the humility of Christ perhaps more than anything else. William Law said: 'Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you'. Andrew Murray said: 'As much as you have of pride within you, so you have a fallen angel alive in you. As much as you have of true humility, so you have the Lamb of God within you'. So we need to ask Jesus for the gift, the grace of humility. We need to look to Jesus, we need to study Him and see His own humility. We need to hear what He taught about this great subject.

So I want us first of all to look at His example, and we're going to be turning to the Scriptures just now. How often the Lord Jesus used the words 'not' and 'nothing' in relation to Himself. I want you to see this, turn with me to John 5 verse 19: 'Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner' - but the Son could do nothing without the Father, and that is the humiliation that the Lord Jesus subjected Himself to. He was God, He had the attributes of God, but He chose to resign those powers to His Heavenly Father as He came to Earth. I don't believe that the Lord Jesus ever operated independently of the Father when He was on earth. He says He does nothing without the Father. Look at verse 30 of the same chapter, look out for these catchwords: 'I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me', verse 41, 'I do not receive honour from men'. Turn to chapter 6 of John verse 38: 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me', chapter 7 verse 16, 'Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me'', verse 28, 'Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, 'You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know''. Chapter 8, look at verse 28: 'Then Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things'', verse 42, 'Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me', verse 50, 'And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges'. Then over finally to chapter 14 verse 10: 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works', verse 24, 'He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me'.

Is it any wonder that Paul said: 'He made Himself nothing'? He emptied Himself, He made Himself of no reputation that God, the Father, might be everything. He resigned His own will, He resigned His powers, He resigned His glory, He resigned His work and His very words entirely to the Father. The import of everything that we're reading that Christ said is: 'It is not I, I am nothing, I have given myself to the Father, the Father is all' - this was surrender and utter dependence upon God, His Father. I want you to note something here: Jesus did not find His identity in Himself, but in God. You must not find your identity in yourself. Some of you have a very low self-esteem, maybe you hate yourselves - you must find yourself, your sense of worth, your sense of being, in God; not in yourself, not in anyone else. Equally, there is old holiness teaching that

tells us to crucify the self - you say: 'That's in the Bible'. Yes, it is but it tells us to crucify our old selves - that's the old man, and the old nature - but there's a lot of holiness teachers and holiness people that are walking around like the living dead, and they look like it and sound like it! Because not only have they crucified the old self, they have crucified themselves - their very personality has died! That's not what the New Testament teaches, the New Testament says that the old self must die with Christ, but the new self - Colossians 3 - must come alive! You've to put on the new self that is in the likeness and image of Jesus.

That's what Jesus was showing us as He lived out of His relationship with God. His being in God the Father brought Him a sense of being within, and it manifested itself in humility. Not just in humility towards His Father, but also He was just as humble in His dealings with men as He was with His Heavenly Father. This is exemplified in His teaching, let me just remind you of some of it - He taught us that the way to know Heaven's blessing on Earth was through humility. His opening words on the Kingdom of God were that the poor in spirit will enter in, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'. Indeed, He taught us that greatness in the Kingdom of God was to be likened to a child, Matthew 18: 'Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven... for he who is least among you will be the greatest'. So the Lord Jesus is teaching that to seek after greatness is not the way to get it in the Kingdom of God! Luke 18 verse 14: 'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' - in other words, the way up is down. It's as if, as one man put it, Jesus Christ reached into the shopping window of humanity, and He switched the labels, the price tags. He has totally changed our evaluation of greatness. In the Kingdom of God the way up is down, the way to greatness is servitude.

Did He not show us the way in John 13 and in verse 14, He said: 'If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet'. In Luke 22 He said: 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors'. But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves'.

'Wouldst thou be great, then lowly serve;
Wouldst thou go up, go down;
But go as low as e'er you will,
The Highest, has gone lower still'.

The path to the higher life, to encountering God, means going lower down. An evangelist, when I was young man, once said to me: 'David, if ever you see a ladder, climb down it!'. Andrew Murray said: 'Just as water always seeks to fill the lowest place, so the moment God finds men abased and empty, His glory and His power flow in to exalt and to bless'. This is the Royal Spirit of the King of Heaven displayed, this is God-like: to humble oneself, to become the servant of all. It was our Lord's example that was His teaching, and it was subsequently the teaching of His apostles - and you remember that they were the ones who argued in His presence about who was the greatest among them. Yet, by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the work of God's grace in their lives, they began to understand the way of their Master. You can see it in the writings of Paul in Philippians 2, how this mind ought to be in us, we ought

to esteem others greater than ourselves. Peter, who often was putting his foot in his mouth, he learned - and we see it in 1 Peter 5 - how we need to clothe ourselves with humility, as Christ clothed and girded Himself with the towel to wash the disciples' feet. Once he said: 'You'll never wash my feet!', and now he is teaching us that this is the way of the Master.

Paul again, in Romans 12:10, says: 'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another'. I love the NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 13 verses 4 and 5, that great passage on love, listen: 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs'. In other words, love has humility at its core, and forgiveness of one another is the fruit of love. Turn with me quickly to Colossians chapter 3, and this is the last passage I'll get you to turn to tonight - Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 and 13. Paul says: 'Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do'. Andrew Murray said: 'The humble person seeks always to act out of this daily rule', listen to it, 'Prefer one another in honour, serve one another, esteem others better than oneself, and submit yourself one to another'. It was the Spirit of Christ in Paul who said: 'Not I, but Christ'.

I think Scripture is very clear, isn't it, that the condition of encountering God is humility. The big question is: how? Isn't it? How can it be done? Well, I want to warn you: do not wrestle with pride, do not try to overcome your pride - because your pride is stronger than you ever imagine. Now, if you're in denial of it tonight, you've got a big problem, and you'll not even accept what I'm saying - but pride comes naturally to us all. I have enough pride to sink a fleet of battleships, and I'm not using false humility - I only know a fraction of what is in my heart, God knows it all, and there's a lot of pride there. We must not deny it, we must be real with it. All of us in our old human nature has Adam, we've got pride, it's there - don't deny it! How do you overcome it? How do you get this humility in order to encounter God? Well, you confess it! You become present to it, and you admit it, and I probably do it on a daily basis: 'Lord', I say, 'deliver me from my pride'. I confess it, and I repent of it, and I renounce it, and I forsake it - and, in faith, I ask Jesus for the grace of humility, the gift of humility. I don't have it, you don't have it, only God can give it.

I want to make this absolutely clear and simple tonight: you can't drum up humility, and you can't put pride to death in your own power. You've got to bring it to God - but, you see, the wonderful mystery and miracle of all this is: when we come in repentance for our natural, innate pride in the old nature, when we bring it to God and admit it, and tell God the way it really is, that in itself is an act of humbling ourselves that will encounter the actual grace of God in humility. What did we read from 1 Peter 5 and verse 5? 'God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble'. Do you know that grace and truth always come together? If you want to know the grace of God in your life, you've got to be truthful, you've got to tell things as they are and admit to God your sin. If your issue is pride - and it is, whether you realise it or not - you've got to confess your pride. If it's the failure, dropout type of perfectionism, or the overachieving, high-achieving excelling - you've got to confess it! Bring it into the light.

I think it was Warren Weirsbe who said: 'God resists the proud, but He can't resist the humble' - and if you bring the truth of your pride to God, God's grace will meet you, and the grace of humility will come to you. You need to receive it by faith - you know, I'm going to repeat myself this week: everything in the Christian life is by grace, it's a free gift, and it is received by faith. So this is a gift of humility that comes in Jesus, He has bought us this by His own precious blood, and we must receive it by faith alone; repenting of our pride and receiving the grace of His humility - and as you receive, you need to thank Him for it! You need to take it, and accept it, and receive it - it's not yours, it's His. You can't even take pride in it.

You say: 'Well, David, is there anything I can do practically to move towards this?'. Well, faith without works is dead, you're right, there are usually practical things that we can do. We must receive this by faith, but there are some things that would be good to put into practice. Dallas Willard, whose writings I highly recommend, has a helpful little devotion that I do day by day called 'Hearing God', and he points out in one of his daily readings how Moses may be the all-time record holder for lengthy encounters with God. Isn't that right? If you know about Moses, you will know there are many times when God talked with him as a man talks to his friend - but Numbers 12 verse 3 says this: 'Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth'. Dallas Willard links these two things: Moses' encounters with God and his humility - and this is what he says, and this is profound: 'We will receive the grace of humility when we refrain from these three things', here's practical for you, 'One: pretending, pretending we are what we know we are not; Two: presuming, presuming a favourable position for ourselves in any respect; Three: pushing, or trying to override the will of others in our own context'. He says, 'This is a failsafe recipe for humility: never push, never presume, and never pretend'. Surely you can remember that? Never push, never presume, and never pretend.

Now let's take those in the time that we have left and be practical. You must confess pride, it's in us all, you must give it to God. Receive in exchange the new nature of the humility of Christ, but in a practical way: one, you must desist from pretending you are what you're not. Do you know what pretending you are what you're not is? It's hypocrisy. 'Hypocrisy' comes from a Greek word which means 'a mask', and the actors used to wear it in the old classical plays. Pretending you're something you're not is self-righteousness, it does not come from God. You could be here tonight, and you could be in denial about the struggles that you're having, you could be in denial about the temptations. You come to church and you look the part, and you sound the part, and you say the cliches, and you believe the doctrines, and you do the right things in the right place - but you know that you're struggling, you're pretending to be what you're not.

We need a lot of honesty, don't we? Transparency, we need to be real with each other, and real with God, and real with ourselves. I have to say, if I'm being real with you: there are some men, Christian men that I know, some of them elders, some of them preachers, and I could never imagine them sinning - I really couldn't. Now stay with me here: I'm not trying to imagine them sinning, don't get me wrong! But I couldn't imagine them sinning, not because they are so holy, but because they are so unreal - they are like cardboard cut-outs. I couldn't even imagine them having temptations! Do you know, the worst pride is religious pride - the worst. Jesus said of the Pharisees: 'You are whitewashed sepulchres, you're whitewashed tombs, all clean and pristine on the outside, and dead men's bones on the inside'. The chief mark of counterfeit

holiness is a lack of humility. Now, you hear that please: the chief mark of a counterfeit holiness is a lack of humility. So if you've got a sect, or a group, or a denomination, or a clique of people that walk around with their nose stuck in the air, and their big Bibles under their arms, and they're hammering people over the head with their doctrine: it is a counterfeit holiness, for the true holiness of God manifests the fruit of humility.

You see, this is what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of the publican and the Pharisee. The tax collector who was unclean, ritually, ceremonially unclean - he was a traitor, he was in cahoots with the Roman Empire, and he was a thief because he was lining his pockets with the extra taxes that he was taking off people that the Empire wasn't charging. He was an untouchable, and he came to the Temple - and there was this Pharisee, and he had his head held high, and in his arrogance he prayed out loud and he said: 'I thank You that I am not as other men. I thank You that I'm not like this tax collector'. Have you ever said: 'I thank You, Lord, that I'm not a drunkard, or I'm not...' - and you're looking down at the sinner. Or you say: 'I thank You that I'm not a Roman Catholic', or 'I'm not a Muslim', or 'I thank You, Lord, that I'm not a Presbyterian' - who would say that? - or 'Thank You, Lord, that I'm not a Baptist, or I'm not Brethren, or I'm not Congregational, thank You, Lord, that I'm not Congregational'? Who would say that? But how many of us look down our noses at people who do not believe what we believe, and that is Pharisaism, it is arrogance, and it has pride at its heart and root: 'I am not like other men'.

Do you know what Jesus said? Listen to how He ends that parable: the tax collector beat his breast, would not so much as lift his eyes heavenward, and he said, 'Be merciful unto me a sinner', and Jesus said, 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'. I'm telling you from personal knowledge of my own heart that pride is the evangelical, fundamentalist, conservative Christian sin. I hope you have ears and heart to receive that. At the root of doctrinal arrogance is pride. Oh, I believe doctrine is important, but it's not more important than humility. If you hold your doctrine with pride, it's an idol. Denominational sectarianism, and so-called holy separatism, I believe is arrogance and pride that is a stench in the holy nostrils of God. Let me ask you a question: does your expression of Christianity produce arrogance, does it? Young fellows running around like old men, know-it-alls. There are a lot of angry Christians about: does your expression of Christianity produce anger? Or does it produce humility and love? Jesus says: 'By this shall all men know that you're My disciples'. We've got to start being honest with each other, we've got to start being honest with God, and being honest with ourselves. I have struggled with pride, every preacher does - Pastor, Amen? If we preach well, we walk out with a fat head, and if we make a mess we're hammering ourselves because we should have done better - it's pride, it's pride! We need to stop looking into ourselves and at ourselves, and look to God, Christ, and His Kingdom. You see, when you have a revelation of God, and a true encounter with God and Jesus Christ, do you know what happens? You're not walking around as if you've no sin, but the consciousness of your sin weighs you down. You become more aware of it. Now, you ought not to stay there, as I said last night, you've got to then look out from your sin, bring your sin to Christ and look to Him for the remedy.

Stop pretending you are what you're not - amen? Secondly, stop presuming a favourable position for yourself in any respect - presumption. Jesus spoke about this in

Luke 14, listen to this, verse 8 says: 'When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable than you be invited by him', one more honourable than me? How could there be such a person? This is how He ends in verse 11: 'For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'. Is this not a problem with us?

Moody, D.L. Moody, was one of the greatest used evangelists the world has ever known I believe. There's a little book I prize in my library, it's falling to pieces, called 'Why God Used D.L. Moody' - it was written by R.A. Torrey. In that little volume there is a chapter on humility, God used D.L. Moody because of his humility. This is what Torrey says: 'I think D. L. Moody was the humblest man I ever met in my life. He loved to quote the words of another; 'Faith gets the most; love works the most; but humility keeps the most'. F.B. Meyer, that great Bible teacher of renown, said of Moody: 'Moody is a man who never seems to have heard of himself, no wonder God used him so wonderfully'. Torrey relates that at his conventions at Northfield and the like, he would push other men to the front and, if he could, he would have them do all the preaching - McGregor, Campbell Morgan, Andrew Murray, and all the rest of them - and he said: 'The only way we could get him to take any part in the program was to get up in the convention and move that we hear D. L. Moody at the next meeting. He continually put himself out of sight' - is that not why God used him?

Now maybe you're confused, and we've got to be honest here and reasonable and rational - you might be, I hope, thinking: 'But, hold on a minute, if you say D.L. Moody was a tremendously gifted man, and God used him perhaps more than many, if not any in modern times, well, was he blind to this? Did he not know that God was using him, and that God had gifted him?'. No - now don't misunderstand here, this is the answer to this problem: you see, you can be exceptionally gifted, you can be tremendously used of God, but true humility is not to deny that but it is to view yourself in the light of God. What do I mean? You lose yourself in Him! You see, you become nothing when you lose yourself in Him! And wait till I tell you: everybody else becomes nothing when you lose yourself in Him! You see, it's not comparing yourself with another - we are not of those who compare ourselves with ourselves. You see, we're not to practice the presence of the audience, or the congregation, and I'm not to practice the presence of some preacher down the road who's probably - there's probably about a hundred of them that are better than I am or will ever be - I'm not to practice their presence, whether I'm better or they're better. I'm to practice the presence of God - and in His presence, I am nothing, and you are nothing.

So that's why it's imperative that we get into His presence, and we see everything in the light of His glory, in the light of His Kingdom and His cause - and that will free us to esteem others better than ourselves, are you getting it? Andrew Murray put it well like this: 'The humble man feels no jealousy or envy' - now the old man will, but the man who has put on the humility of Christ, made no provision for the flesh, who repents of his innate pride and puts on the humility of Jesus as a grace gift, he can praise others! 'He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised and himself forgotten, because in God's presence he has learnt to say with Paul, 'I am nothing'. He has received the spirit of Jesus, who did not please Himself, and did not seek His own honour'.

Do you know, William Kelly said: 'True humility is not thinking bad about yourself, it's just not thinking about yourself at all'. God doesn't ask us to think bad of ourselves, He

asks us to lose ourselves in Him - and do you know what will happen? We will then find our true selves. Stop pretending, stop presuming, but thirdly and finally: stop pushing, or trying to override the will of others in your context and surrounding. There are a lot of pushy Christians about, aren't there? No 'Amen's', no? There are a lot of pushy believers, and there are a lot of pushy Christian leaders about as well. Now leaders must lead, and they must lead with the authority - which comes with character by the way, not with rank - but few people lead with humility. It has to be said that few church members act in humility. Do you know what you need to do from this night? If you're pushing, stop pushing - and as for those pushy people around you, you need to look on every brother or sister who irritates or troubles you, as God's means of grace to humble you, as an instrument to start to see them better than yourself. Boy, what an exercise that would be!

Listen, you can remember this, surely you can: never push, never presume, never pretend - in fact, do what Paul did: he took every opportunity to humble himself before men. He says: 'I glory in my infirmities, in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me'. He took pleasure in his trials, in his weaknesses, in his distresses - he took pleasure in humiliation, for it freed him from self. 'Whatever is said about you, rejoice, for you're with the prophets' - you're in good company if men are saying ill about you! As Murray puts it: 'It is only in the possession of God that I lose myself. In the height, and breath, and glory of the sunshine, the littleness of a particle of dust is seen flying in the sunlight. In the same way, humility is our being in God's presence nothing but specks dwelling in the sunlight of His love'.

What do I want us to do at the close tonight? I want you to celebrate your littleness and God's greatness. It's not that you aren't special to God, He shed the blood of Jesus for you, but if you want to encounter God tonight and every day of your life: God dwells, the High and the Holy One, with them that are of a low and a contrite heart - the humble.

'He humbled Himself to the manger,
And even to Calvary's tree.
But I am so proud and unwilling
His humble disciple to be'.

I love the story about the family that went on holiday, and they all shared the one room and the one bed. Above the bed head there was a picture of Jesus Christ, and opposite the bed there was a dresser with a mirror. The wee girl in the morning got up, woke up, sat up in the bed, and she saw herself. Then she lay down again, then she got up, then she lay down, and she said: 'Mummy, Daddy, Mummy, look at this! When I lie low I can see Jesus, but when I see myself I don't see Him'.

Let us pray. Now let us be still - I hope that you are aware of the presence of God here tonight. We want to create space for God to move, and for you to respond. Is there anyone here tonight - theoretically, I know we don't do it on theory, but theoretically there should not be anyone who is exempt from my statement now - but is there anyone whom God has spoken to about pride, that has either been very very evident and you're conscious of it, or has been dormant and you have been ignorant of it - you haven't realised. Maybe you have even taken pride in some kind of humility, some people take pride in poverty and being working class and all the rest - that's pride. Is there anyone here tonight, in the presence of God, and I'm going to ask you to stand -

I'm going to ask you to stand, because it's pride that stops you doing things like standing: 'I don't need to stand, I don't need to stand I'm standing in my heart, God reads my heart'. He reads your heart if you're afraid to stand because of pride and what other people will think. I'm not wanting to put guilt on you - there are people standing already - I don't want to put guilt on you, but we are trying to be real with God in order to encounter Him. If you want an encounter with God, and you're going to walk out of this place not admitting your pride - forget about it!

Just in the quietness and the presence of God, stand to your feet. Now you confess, I can't do it for you, and I would encourage you, please, to take it on your lips - the person beside you doesn't need to hear, but it would be good to whisper - it's important to declare and pronounce truth. I'm not asking you to say it out loud, don't be afraid - just take it on your lips as if you were speaking to someone who was lip-reading. Speak it out, confess pride, and the type of pride it is. Confess the worst of it: religious pride. If you have been legalist, confess it, for it's a curse if ever there was one. Confess it. Confess looking down your nose at other people, other denominations. Confess - this might rock some of you - confess criticising Catholics. Who are you to criticise anybody? Who am I? Oh yes, we must present the plumbline of truth - but oh, we have so often stepped over the mark, so often, and we've enjoyed it - and I've done it more than probably most of you. Repent now, what other pride is there? Pride of position? Pride of education? Christian homes are filled with intellectual academic pride. Pride of class? Pride of profession? What is there? Pride of family? Pride of culture? Come on, confess it - blood and thunder bands around, blattering drums at the pride of this, and the pride of that, and the pride of the other - confess it. Bring it to the Lord, bring it out, bring it present, confess it and say: 'Lord, I can't do anything with it'. I want you to do something, with the eyes of your heart I want you to see Jesus on the cross - and I want you, as it were, and you can even do it physically, lift all that pride and say: 'Lord, here it is, here's what I am and what I have, take it into Yourself. You died for my pride' - and the great exchange will be, 'Lord Jesus, give me Your humility by the Holy Spirit. I give You my pride , give me Your humility, Lord Jesus'.

Receive it by faith, and thank Him for it: 'Thank You, Lord Jesus, I receive, I accept Your humility. Help me not to pretend any more, help me not to presume, help me not to push'. Ask Him now, I know we'll be preaching on it even tomorrow night, as you're empty now, ask Him to cleanse you by the precious blood, and ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Receive it by faith, we will talk about it tomorrow night - but you don't have to wait until tomorrow night, say: 'Lord, give me the power to live this Christ-life, give me Your life, fill me now with the Holy Spirit of God, in Jesus' name, Amen'. You may be seated.

Father who sees all, and searches the deep things of the heart, I confess my pride - and I ask You, Lord, as I repent of it, to deliver me afresh. All of us together would ask, O Lord, deposit within us the very meekness and humility of Jesus. We humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God tonight, may we be exalted not in ourselves but in our God. High and Lofty One, take us into Your presence even higher now, as we descend even lower - for I must decrease, and He must increase. Amen.

Encountering God - Chapter 4

"How To Be Filled With The Spirit - The Energy Of Encountering God"

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by David Legge*

I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 1. The series, of course, has been entitled 'Encountering God'. I don't know if you have been with us on previous evenings, but we've looked at 'The Call to Encounter God', which was 'The Cost of Discipleship' on Sunday evening. On Monday night we looked at 'The Atmosphere of Encountering God', which is 'Practising God's Presence'. Last night we looked at 'The Condition of Encountering God', which is humility, as opposed to the all-encompassing problem of pride that affects us all. If you don't think it affects you, you need to get last night's message, because we saw how it's a problem all of us struggle with and we ought not to be in denial of it. Tonight I want to take up this vast subject of 'The Energy of Encountering God', the Spirit-filled life, or 'How to Be Filled by the Holy Spirit' - and I find myself preaching a lot on this theme, because I feel it's essential, and it's a message that has been lost somewhere in the ether of recent Christian history. When you preach it, unfortunately people think you're preaching something new - but you're not.

Let us pray before we come to read the scriptures together. If you were out on Monday night, we want you to practice God's presence and become present to the fact that God is here. You should already be aware of His presence, He has been very near in these meetings - but if you haven't, or if you desire, and you should desire, to have a greater sense and depth of His presence: come to Him now, and open your heart, and by faith invoke that presence, lay hold of it as the promise of God now as we come in prayer to Him.

Father, we come to You, and believe that You are here. We lift our eyes and see You just now in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ revealed to be with us, Immanuel. We thank You that by Your Spirit You have come to dwell amongst Your people, and in Your people. Just now we see the Commander of the Lord of Hosts before us, and we look up - as it were - Lord, and see You with sword drawn in Your hand to do battle on behalf of your people. Lord, in the spirit we see the heavenly host of angels with us, we believe that there are angels gathering around. We say: summon Your power, O God, show us Your strength, our God, as You have done before. 'Because of Your Temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may the beast bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war. Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God. Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to Him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the heavens. You, God, are awesome in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to His people'. Heavenly Father, it is Your promised power of Pentecost that we claim now by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, His blood and resurrection. Lord, as You have promised, in these last days pour out Your Spirit now

upon all flesh. Amen.

Acts chapter 1 then, and we're going to read only a few verses, verse 4, 5, and then down to verse 8: *"And being assembled together with them, He", that is, the Lord Jesus resurrected, "commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which', He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'".* Down to verse 8: *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth".*

One of the greatest tragedies of Christendom is that the One whom we most need in this present day and age to live the Christian life in power, has actually become a source of controversy. Indeed, the Holy Spirit has become a topic - He who is a person - has become merely a topic of division. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that the Holy Spirit now is an issue of full-on theological war - and that is tragic, because we need the Holy Spirit of the Living God to live this Christian life, it is utterly impossible to live it without Him. That's why Jesus said: 'It is expedient', it is necessary, 'that I leave you, that the Comforter, the Advocate, might come'. So Jesus was telling His disciples that He had to go for Another of the same kind to come to them, and - though the Lord Jesus was limited in His bodily form to one geographical location, and largely His ministry was external - when the Holy Spirit of the Living God would come, His ministry would be universal and would be internal. So, we need the Holy Spirit - and it is a tragedy that we get bogged down with debate and theological niceties at the expense of knowing the personal, dynamic power of the Third Person of the Trinity.

An equal tragedy is the abuse and error and perversion that is performed in the name of the Holy Spirit in Christendom. I don't want you to misunderstand and think that I am blessing, as it were, and putting my benediction on everything that is supposed to be the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit today. All you have to do is take a casual viewing of satellite television - and not everything is wrong on it, it has to be said, but there is a great deal of excess, extremism and perversion in the name of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, I heard of a travelling evangelist recently who was going around laying his hands on people and instructing them to say 'banana' backwards, and telling them they had the gift of tongues and had been baptised in the Holy Spirit. It's laughable, if it wasn't so serious. We are not condoning error, and there is a great deal of aberrant practices in Pentecostal and charismatic circles - not everything is bad there, don't misunderstand what I'm saying now, but there are things going on that are counterfeits: some things of the flesh, some things that are merely learned behaviour, and - dare I say it - some things that are of another spirit.

Whilst we must herald that warning, especially in the day and the age in which we live when there is so much confusion, we also must be aware that Satan only counterfeits the true. Do you understand what I'm saying? To use a common expression around these parts: you ought not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Out of fear of that which is obviously not of God, many have retreated back into a corner of disbelief concerning the Person and the power of the Holy Spirit. In a reaction against the wild things that are going on in His name, we have effectively quenched the Spirit of God! David Pawson, writing on this very thing, said: 'I have been amazed by a kind of schizophrenic attitude to the supernatural among some evangelicals who are entirely credulous toward anything bound between black leather covers, and profoundly

sceptical about anything happening today'. We read the Bible, and we believe in the miracles, and we would confound the liberals - but well dare God do anything like it today! We have to be so careful that we are not reactionary against error to such an extent that we deny that power that we so desperately need, and that is so obviously absent from the church and Christian's lives today. As the late, great Leonard Ravenhill said: 'We are warned of false fire by fireless men, and then we too often settle for no fire at all'.

An old Brethren article was drawn to my attention recently from a dear brother in Australia, no less. It was an article that I think was derived from here after the 1859 revival. It was in the writings 'Things New and Old', a Brethren writing let me remind you. It was entitled 'The Awakening in Ulster, Part 4', and the writer says - while discussing some of the special features of the revival movement in the area of dreams, visions, and prophecies - this is what this Brethren writer said: 'One thing is certain, we are sure to err when we venture to lay down an iron rule, or frame a rigid system; the Holy Ghost will never be confined by such. He is sovereign in His doings. Let us remember this. His operations lie beyond the range of the most enlarged and vigorous understanding'. I want to make an absolute statement: that in every revival, in every awakening, in every act of renewal in the church of Jesus Christ there has been a rediscovery of the truth of the Personality and the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit - without exception. That is essentially what revival is - God's Spirit power returning to the church!

Of course, that's what original Christianity was - I mean, the book of Acts that we read together is clear there. I used to preach that the book of Acts was merely an historical record of early Christianity, that was wrong. Luke is an historian, but it's no mere history - just the way Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not mere history. The Acts of the Apostles is actually what we call 'theological narrative'. It is a story of historical fact, but it is written in such a way to teach us the truth of God and what is necessary for our own lives. The book of Acts is original Christianity as it was meant to be. We read tonight how our Lord Jesus Christ - after He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, was buried and rose again from the dead, according to the Scriptures - He stands among His own disciples and He basically says to them: 'Now, do nothing'. I mean, imagine that, it's the opposite to everything you hear in Christianity today! Jesus said: 'Do nothing before Pentecost, before the promise of the Father comes upon you that you have heard from Me, do nothing! Do not go out and preach the Gospel, do not go out and help the poor, don't go and do tract distribution, don't go to the mission field. Do nothing without Pentecost, for without Me you can do nothing'.

Now, this is instructive because we do know that the disciples, the Apostles, have had some experience of the Holy Spirit previously. They had to be born again, didn't they? That's the Holy Spirit does that. They also, we know from John 20 and 22, experienced the Lord Jesus breathing over them and saying: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. So these men were not ignorant of the Person and power of the Holy Spirit to a certain extent - and yet they still needed their Pentecost, they still needed the promise of the Father in fullness.

The message that the early Christians preached is clear, indeed in Acts chapter 20 we read that Paul went from house to house preaching repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ - and that, essentially, is all you need to have your sins forgiven, to be justified and be on your way to Heaven, to have the assurance of eternal life as the gift

of God: repentance, changing your mind, turning from your sin, repentance toward God and then faith in Jesus Christ, His message and His sacrifice and resurrection. But, do you know something? Though that's enough to get your sins cleansed, that was not all there was to the New Testament experience of discipleship - there was more involved. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that Christian initiation was fourfold. Yes, in the early church there was repentance toward God and there was faith in Jesus Christ, but then we see clearly that there was water baptism, and then there was Spirit baptism. Sometimes the Spirit baptism came before the water baptism.

Now listen carefully: I'm not here to argue terminology with you tonight, and I will not argue with you if you wait behind to get me - that's not why I'm here. I don't really care whether you call it 'Spirit baptism', 'fullness of the Spirit', 'an infilling of the Spirit', as the Puritans called it and Martyn Lloyd-Jones 'the sealing of the Spirit', John Wesley called it 'perfect love'. I like what Billy Graham said: 'I don't care what you call it, just get it!'. The point that I'm making tonight is clearly biblical: that the dynamic of the Spirit was absolutely essential for early Christianity, for individual Christians and for the witness of the church. It was the fullness of Christian experience: to repent, to believe, to be baptised in water and baptised by the Spirit. Both the church and the Christian are designed like an engine to be empowered by ignition - fire, that is. That's why you were saved, that's why the church comes together, that's why it was born at Pentecost: to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit, manifestly so - but the problem we have, generally speaking here in the West and, yes, in our good old land of Ulster, we have a form of godliness which denies the power right across the board!

I'm reminded of a story I love told by the 19th-century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who once told of the village inhabited by ducks. On Sunday the ducks would waddle out their doors to church down the street, and they waddled into the sanctuary and they squatted in their favourite pews. The duck choir - do you have a duck choir? - the duck choir, they would waddle out and sit in their place. The duck pastor would waddle up to the pulpit and open the Bible, and he would read: 'Ducks! God has given you wings, with wings you can fly, with wings you can mount up and soar like eagles! No walls can confine you, no fence can hold you! You have wings! God has given you wings, and you can fly!'. Excitedly they would all flap and quack, and then, after saying a hearty 'Amen', they all waddled home. Do you get the point? We make a lot of claims, we sing about it, we pray about it, our creedal statements confess it, and we in a sense celebrate it - and yet we are not flying, so many of us!

We are seeing so little returns for what we're doing - and I know about this myself all too well. I remember after preaching one Sunday evening an unbeliever came to me, a number of years ago now, and he said: 'I agree with the words that you spoke there tonight, but it just wasn't getting through, it just wasn't getting through'. Now that man thought there was something wrong with him, I went away thinking there was something wrong with me - and maybe there was something wrong with the both of us, but I meditated on what was said of the Apostle Paul, that his enemies said that his bodily presence was weak and his speech was contemptible. He wasn't an orator, perhaps, like Apollos, and yet he was able to say to the Thessalonians: 'Our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit'. He did not speak in the wisdom of men's human words, but he spoke in the demonstration and the power of the Holy Spirit, as did the apostle Peter at Pentecost. He preached one sermon and 3000 souls were saved, and we can preach 3000 sermons today and not see a soul converted!

There's much I could say about that tonight, but I want to concentrate on the individual. I want to help you tonight, if you're not flying. I want to talk about the necessity and the practicality of being filled with the Spirit - or to put it another way: Why should I be filled, and how can I be filled? So let's do firstly with the necessity: why should you be filled? Now, surely it should be obvious to you from what I've already said - but let me make it more personal: you're struggling tonight, you're struggling with temptation and sin, you're certainly not experiencing a victorious Christian life. Now don't misunderstand me: no one experiences a victorious Christian life every day of the week, every day of the year, 24/7, it doesn't happen. But maybe you have that rollercoaster experience, like the Grand Old Duke of York: sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down, sometimes you're neither halfway up nor down - you don't know where you are tonight. You're struggling, you've been failing, and the reason is - and this is a revelation of God to you tonight, and you've got to hear it: you're trying to live the Christian life in the flesh, and you cannot do it! Here's the release for you this evening, it's letting you off the hook: the Christian life is an impossible life to live, it is utterly impossible, so don't even try it! It cannot be done in the flesh, it must be done in the power of God. It is the life of God.

Paul says: 'It's not I, but Christ who lives in me'. Now that doesn't mean that you don't have to cooperate with God, and there are things for you to do - but the energy, that's what we're talking about tonight, the energy of encountering God is not your human energy, it's not even your willpower, it's not even your doctrine and theology, it is the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet some are trying to, as it were, drive their car without ignition, without fire. You know what happens, you have to get out then and start pushing - and there are a lot of pushers about. In fact, the Galatians were pushers, Paul told them: 'You began in the Spirit, you were born again', they were probably filled in the Spirit as well, they had seen miracles done in their midst, but now they were trying to perfect their Christianity in the flesh by keeping laws. That so often happens in Christian circles: you get rid of some burdens of sin, and then you join the church and they give you a whole load of other burdens. You're weighed down with burdens that are too heavy to be borne - that's not Christianity.

D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, said: 'You might as well try to hear without ears, or breathe without lungs, as to try and live the Christian life without the Spirit of God in your heart'. The famous Boston preacher, Dr A.J. Gordon visited the World Fair in Chicago on one occasion, and in the distance he saw a man robed in bright, gaudy Oriental clothes, who appeared to be laboriously turning a crank on a pump. Thereby he was making a mighty flow of water come. Gordon was impressed with the man's energy, and the smooth motions, and his obvious physical conditioning - he was pumping a tremendous amount of water. Drawing closer, Gordon was surprised to discover that the man was actually made of wood. Instead of turning the crank and making the water flow, the flow of water was actually turning the crank and thereby making the man go. That's Christianity. Some of you have been doing a lot of work, a lot of pumping, expending a lot of physical human energy, and not getting too far - that is not life as God intended for you, that is not the energy by which you will encounter God. Listen to our Lord Jesus: 'On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'', John says, 'But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet

glorified'. But here's news tonight: Jesus is glorified, and the Comforter has come. The Spirit has been poured out upon the church - that's why we need Him, because it is impossible to live this Christian life without Him... and maybe you have been trying.

Maybe you believe in everything I've said so far tonight, and you've heard it so often in your experience - and yet you feel you still haven't broken through to that. That's why I want to spend most of my time tonight not on the necessity, but on the practicality: how can I be filled with the Spirit? Let me clear up a couple of misunderstandings. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not the same as being consecrated. I want you to understand this, because many dear people in holiness meetings and conventions have genuinely consecrated themselves to the Lord - but they are not filled with the Spirit. It's not surrender either, you can surrender everything to the Lord. If you like: consecration is the giving of your vessel to the Lord, surrender is the emptying of your vessel out to the Lord - but, you see, the vessel still needs to be filled. It's a bit like just repenting of your sin, but not actually believing in the Lord to be saved - it's only half of the exercise, it's only our side, if you like, of the agreement.

Let me say that being filled with the Spirit is not being holy enough. Some people have taught down through the years that you need to get holy, you need to stop doing this, you need to start doing that; you need to sanctify yourself, almost, and then the Holy Ghost will come upon you. If you were able to do all those things, you wouldn't need the Holy Spirit! Eh? I've said to you already, and I will say it many times: the whole Christian operation is a by grace, through faith exercise. God gives it all by gratuitous grace through the merits of the shed blood and the resurrection of His Son, it's all because of Jesus - and the only way we get any blessing or benefits of it is receiving it by faith. Grace is the hand of God that gives it, and faith is our hand that receives it. The fullness of the Spirit, or whatever you want to call it, baptism of the Spirit, is exactly the same.

Let me help you understand this tonight. Turn with me to Luke chapter 11, beginning to read at verse 9, Jesus our Lord is speaking, and He says: 'So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'. Now look at this passage for a moment. The Lord is encouraging us to come to Him and ask for gifts. One of the greatest master strokes of Satanic forces was to make the church afraid of the Holy Spirit! There are so many dear Christians who maybe are turned off because of the errors and extremes in the Spirit's name, who are afraid that if they surrender to the Holy Spirit and are filled by Him, they'll start saying things that they don't know what they're saying - and they're afraid of that. Or the Holy Spirit will tell them to do things that they're not sure they want to do, and they're even afraid of being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Now, whenever we talk about 'being controlled by the Holy Spirit', we're only talking about His sweet influence. One of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control - what the Holy Spirit does is, He frees you to be in control of your life under His influence! He's not going to turn you into a robot, He's not going to make you do things or say things that you don't want to do and say. That's a lie of the devil, and I would question

anyone who is taken over and possessed by another power where they are completely out of control. Now yes, God can overwhelm us, and yes we can almost lose ourselves in God - some people have some wonderful experiences - but ultimately, in all of those deep encounters with God, you can come out of them if you want - unless He knocks you out cold, and that can happen. We're not making rules here, but we're just saying: don't be afraid of the Holy Spirit. Look: if a son asks a parent for bread, will he give him a stone? If you come to God and ask for bread - and this is what the fullness of the Spirit is like, it's like your daily bread - if you come to God and ask Him, is He going to mock you and give you a stone? Worse than that, if you ask for a fish, will He give you a serpent? Or if you ask for an egg, will He offer you a scorpion? A serpent and a scorpion will harm you, is God going to give you something that is going to harm you when you come and ask for the Holy Spirit? That is a lie from the devil, and you need to get rid of it because it's holding some of you back. Some of you are afraid of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, the ministry of the Spirit.

If you're evil - and you are depraved, you're a sinner, so am I - but if your wee fellow, or your wee girl, or some child came to you famished, with a belly that was empty, a palette that was parched, and holes in their shoes if they even had shoes on their feet - would anyone of you turn them away? How much more, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? Do you think this is something God wants to do? By repentant faith - everything is received by repentant faith or believing repentance - you've got to claim the promise of the Father, just come and ask Him! You have the assurance of God's word, 1 John 5:14: 'This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us'.

Now, if you grew up in a Christian home, you may have had the experience of asking the Lord Jesus to be your Saviour every night of the week until you were about five-year-old or something like that - do you know what I'm talking about? You wanted to be sure, and you kept asking the Lord, and asking the Lord, and asking the Lord - but then there came a day when you really broke through with God, wasn't there? Or you drew a line, and you said: 'Well, this is it, I'm going to take tonight as my night', or whatever - why were you not genuinely saved those days that you kept asking the Lord over and over again as a child? Was the Lord listening? Of course the Lord was listening - but you didn't believe that He heard you. You didn't believe that He heard you, you didn't believe that He'd saved you - that's why you got up and kept doubting. You see, here is a truth that many miss, and many are confounded by in the realm of the fullness of the Spirit - because you have asked God over again and again to do it, and you've been agonising over it, and it has almost sent you mad, and yet you know that it has not happened! But, you see, you're keeping asking, but you're not believing that you're receiving. You see, you've got to ask in faith. Listen to what I've said so many times: everything in the Christian life is received by faith. It would surprise you how many people of faith - that's the Christian - don't understand what faith actually is.

Turn with me quickly to Mark chapter 11, I'm wanting to help people who are struggling here. Mark chapter 11 verse 24, again our Lord Jesus - now read this slowly and watch every word, Jesus says: 'Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them'. Read that again: 'Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them'. Now we often hear: 'Believe and you will receive', but what Jesus

is saying here is, 'Believe you have received when you ask, and you will receive what you've asked'. This is going a step further that many of you have not gone. You see, to ask in faith for the fullness of the Spirit is to come with the word of God as the promise, to claim it by faith in prayer - as Jesus said, 'How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask' - but you must ask in faith, and that means believe that He has heard, that you have the things, you're confident you have the things that you have asked of Him according to His will; and you say, 'Thank You, Lord, thank You that I have received, thank You that You have filled me!'.

But what are you looking for? You see, this is the problem: what are you seeking? Some people are seeking an experience rather than a Person. The Holy Spirit is not an experience, He's a Person. Now, He will give experiences, but He's a Person. I'm not against feelings, far from it - in fact, some people forget that God was the One created emotions. Did you know that? They didn't come from the devil, God created them! But we must also be careful with them, because feelings and emotions are fickle, they are very elusive, and they cannot be trusted on their own. Feelings must be regulated. It's a bit like a compass, you know the way a compass is directed by the magnetism of the Earth - well, our feelings must be directed by an external, greater force, and that force is faith in the truth of God. A brilliant Navigator illustration of it is: if you imagine a steam engine, and two carriages behind the steam engine, think of the steam engine as the facts - the truth of God's word - then think of the first passenger carriage as faith in the facts, then think of the third part of the equation, the second carriage, as being feelings. It is the facts that our faith is in, and then the feelings will come - but only when everything is in the right order. A lot of folk, they want the feelings first. They want to have some kind of feeling and experience that they have been filled, and then they will believe - and that's not the way it works! It's faith in the facts, then many experiences can come.

Have you been looking for a feeling or an experience, and you haven't just taken God at His naked, raw truth, and just put your fingernails of faith - even if it's a mustard seed of faith - into God's truth? You see, feelings don't really mean much on their own. A poor amputee feels that they've still got that limb, and they might even feel the pain in the leg or in the arm - they feel the pain, and they look down and it's not there. W.P. Nicholson was ill on one occasion, and he went privately to an expert for medical treatment. This expert sat him down and put electrodes on him, and then the doctor went off and read his paper and had a cup of coffee. If you know anything about Nicholson, you will know - well, he was gruff at times. He got a bit worked up about this, and he burst out eventually at the doctor and said: 'I'm a busy man, Doctor! I don't have time to come over here and sit and watch you drink coffee and read your paper! When are you going to start my treatment?'. The doctor said: 'Mr Nicholson, there's enough electricity running through your body right now to push a train up a hill'. Nicholson said: 'Something's wrong, because I don't feel a thing'. The doctor had a little adapter, I don't know how this works, but he had a little adapter and he attached a lightbulb to it. When he connected it the lightbulb lit, and Mr Nicholson realised that the Spirit might be flowing through you, and you not even realise it until the need arises.

We have to be careful with feelings. They have their place, but beware that that is not what you're confounded at with regards to the fullness of the Spirit. Listen, you would tell a sinner under conviction who says, 'I don't feel like God is going to save me', or 'I don't feel like I'm saved' after they trust Christ, you would say: 'No, it's not about

feelings, it's about trusting what God has said and asking Him, and believing on raw faith that He has done it'. That's how assurance comes, and that's how the fullness of the Spirit comes.

Having said that, there is not just objective witness of the word of God and faith, but there is and there ought to come a subjective witness of the Spirit that the Comforter has come. We know this because of Scripture: all who believed and received by mere faith, had a witness that they had been filled - and there should be some witness that the Comforter has come. Now many people have different experiences, and this is often where the problem comes. We read Christian biographies and we want the experience that someone else had. We wouldn't dream of doing that with a testimony of salvation, would we? We know we are all individuals, and God leads us in different ways - neither ought we to do that with the experience of fullness. Faith is what counts, but there ought to be a confirmation - in other words, you ought to know that you are filled. I asked for years to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and I did take it by faith, and I believe that God heard me - but if you had asked me: 'Do you know? Do you have a witness?', I couldn't have said 100% 'I'm sure' - I can tell you, I can say it now. It's not arrogant to say that, because it's got nothing to do with me.

In the book of Acts, the witness often was that people spoke in tongues, but not always. Certainly in Acts chapter 1 we have this: 'You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'. I know a man who went to a meeting, and he claimed by simple faith the fullness of the Spirit. He went on the bus home, it was in Hong Kong, and he was sitting beside an unbeliever, and he had this sudden compulsion to witness to them. You might say: 'Well, isn't that wonderful', but you see this was a man who never had that compulsion before. The strange thing is, he didn't witness to the man, he kept his mouth shut - but he took that urge in his soul to witness and share Christ with that man as evidence that the Comforter had come, the Holy Spirit had filled him - and the Holy Spirit had. He would have had more of a witness, I believe, if he had spoken for the Lord Jesus.

There is a power that will come when, by faith alone, you repent and believe and receive this as the promise of God, and believe that He has given it, and thank Him for it - but then ask Him, and openly say, 'Lord, You witness this to me however You see fit'. Are you open enough to God to do that? As a young man, Oswald Chambers of 'My Utmost for His Highest' fame, battled a persistent sense of barrenness in the Christian life - is that what you have? He finally wrote: 'I was getting desperate', listen, 'I knew no one who had what I wanted. In fact, I did not even know what I did want' - but listen to this - 'but I knew that if what I had was all the Christianity there was, the thing was a fraud!'. You see, that's where we need to get to: reality with ourselves, reality with God, 'If what I have is all there is, it's a fraud!'. Chambers says: 'Then Luke 11:13 got hold of me' - 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask'. He says: 'At a little meeting in Dunoon, a well-known lady was asked to take the after meeting. She did not speak, but she set to prayer, and then sang, 'Touch me again, Lord'. I felt nothing, but I knew emphatically my time had come. I rose to my feet. Then and there I claimed the gift of the Holy Spirit in dogged committal on Luke 11:13'. Listen to what he says: 'I had no vision of heaven or of angels; I had nothing. I was as dry and empty as ever, no power or realization of God, no witness of the Holy Spirit. Then I was asked to speak at a meeting and forty souls came out to the front to Christ! I came to realize that God intended me, having asked, to simply take it by

faith, and that the power would be there. I might see it only by a backward look, but I was to reckon on the fact that God would be with me'. Take it by faith, and let God witness it subjectively!

A.W. Tozer said the same, he said: 'When I was a young man I happened to get into the company of an elderly woman. God bless her memory, she did not have too much theology - but she believed that the way to get filled by the Holy Spirit was to get down on your knees and die out, and open your heart. Not having very much theology either at the time - I thank God - I obeyed. The result was an old-fashioned mighty invasion of my nature by the Holy Spirit'. You can resist the Holy Spirit by your stubbornness - are some of you doing that tonight? You can grieve the Holy Spirit by your sin. Yes, you don't have to be the finished article and perfect to be filled, but you do need to be willing to let go of your sin. You can quench the Holy Spirit. How can you quench the Holy Spirit? Well, just the way you quench a flame: you cover it with something, you extinguish it. You can extinguish a flame when you ignore it and don't tend it - how rude to ignore the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity! In conservative evangelicalism today we worship, to a large extent, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Scriptures - we've left the Holy Spirit out. If you ignore the Holy Spirit, and you preach against the Holy Spirit, how can you expect to know the fire of the Holy Spirit?

If you ignore that flame it will go out. If you no longer tend that flame - some of you might have been filled years ago, but like Paul said to Timothy: 'You need to stir up the gift of God that is within you'. You've lost the fire. I don't care what happened to you when you were in your 20s or your 30s - has it gone tonight? A flame can be ignored, it can be no longer tended, or it can be, as I said, overwhelmed by something else. This is what happened in the early church, the Spirit of God, and His power, and His gifts, and His leadership was overwhelmed by church tradition and hierarchy. The Spirit was substituted by doctrine, doctrine that was divorced from unction - and that's what we have even today in modern evangelicalism! We have unbelief in the guise of theology!

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? You now know how. Will you, tonight, take it by faith, and thank God that He has heard you - for it will make all the difference. Paul Rader wrote many hymns, one of which is 'Fear Not, Little Flock, Whatever Your Lot'. On one occasion he preached a mighty sermon on that text in John: 'Out of a man's innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'. Later at the end of the meeting, two men who had heard the sermon asked Mr Rader to meet them for a meal and for discussion. One man began by saying: 'Mr Rader, you preached a good sermon, but you're all wrong dispensationally'. The other said: 'Mr Rader, you're a good preacher, and a good brother - the problem is: you've got the wrong interpretation'. Mr Rader did not answer, but he bowed his head along with them to pray and give thanks before eating the meal. When Mr Rader finally looked across the table, having given thanks, he saw the first brother, something had happened to him - tears were streaming down the man's face, and his shoulders were shaking with emotion. Finally he said: 'Brother Rader, we have interpretation, but you have the rivers of blessing'.

Do you have the right interpretation tonight, whatever that is? You think it's right, but you don't have the rivers of living water.

Let us pray. Let us settle our hearts just now. I don't really need to say any more, except this: I want to invite you to do what Oswald Chambers said he did. When he

had got to the end of himself regarding this issue, he said: 'I rose to my feet, and then and there I claimed the gift of the Holy Spirit in dogged committal on Luke 11:13' - which, let me remind you again, says 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask'. I want you now, in just a moment, to stand to your feet in dogged committal on this verse, and ask God to fill you once and for all. It'll not be a 'for all' filling, I don't mean it's all you need - you must then, Ephesians 5:18: 'Be continually being filled by the Holy Spirit day by day', continually repenting and believing, and turning to the Lord, and taking up your cross and following Him. But this that you have longed for, don't look for the feeling, don't look for the experience, just look by faith to God for the promise that He has given to you - and cash it in! Then turn and thank Him for it, and believe that you have received - not believe that you're going to receive, believe that you have received what you've asked, and thank Him for it, and ask Him to witness it to you as He sees fit.

Psalm 37 verse 5 says: 'Commit your way to the LORD, trust in Him, and He will act' - you've got to commit this once and for all, just commit it to Him and then thank Him, and He will act then. Just where you are, in the presence of God, those who want to be filled, stand to your feet. Now you don't need me, but if you wish to follow this prayer to help you, do it now: "Father, I come to You in Jesus' name. I confess Him afresh as my Lord and my Saviour, and I in repentant faith turn to You for Your promise, and the promise of Your Son: the gift of the Holy Spirit in fullness. I ask You now, according to Your promise, to fill me full of the Holy Spirit" - and you use the terminology you wish, to fill me, to possess me, to baptise me - "Come and immerse me in the power of the blessed Holy Spirit. I take it by faith now, I receive". Now drink it in, drink Him in, the rivers of living water, receive in your heart - say: "Lord, I receive now Your promise, I believe I receive Your promise now, and I thank You that You have heard me. I thank You, I choose to believe that You have come and I have received by faith. I ask You to witness it to me as You will, Lord. I believe Your word, I believe Your promise, I receive and I thank You".

O Lord, I pray for this company now. I can't pray for them individually, Lord, but as I look over this congregation at those who are engaging with You now - O, I pray now Lord:

'O Thou that camest from above,
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of our heart.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayers and fervent praise'.

Lord, You have said 'The promise is to you, to your children, and to all who are afar off'. Lord, this is our promise, it belongs to us - pour out Your Spirit on all flesh now, come Holy Spirit, come. Possess Your Temple, that our sons and our daughters shall prophesy, our young men shall see visions, our old men shall dream dreams. On Your menservants and on Your maidservants may You pour out Your Spirit in these days, that they shall prophesy. Come Holy Spirit, You are welcome here, You are welcome in

our hearts, You are welcome in our homes. Come Holy Spirit, find Your home in us. Lord, may we go now with the blessing of the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Encountering God - Chapter 5

"Sins, Wounds And Demons - The Barriers To Encountering God"

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First Thessalonians 5. We've covered quite a bit of ground, haven't we, these nights? Sunday night, 'The Call to Encounter God', which is 'The Cost of Discipleship', the cost that must be paid if we're going to know the Lord. Monday night we looked at 'The Atmosphere of Encountering God', which is 'Practising the Presence of God' - and, praise Him, we've enjoyed that Presence these evenings. Then on Tuesday night, can anybody help me out? Humility? Yes, that is 'The Condition of Encountering God', humility rather than pride. Then last evening we looked at 'The Energy of Encountering God', which is the Holy Spirit, the necessity and the practicality of being filled with the Spirit.

Tonight we're looking at the obstacles, some obstacles to encountering God. Maybe you've been discouraged these nights, or in general in your Christian experience? You are discouraged because you don't seem to get through, and you don't experience the victory and the depths that others have known. So I want to look at that tonight under the heading of 'Sins, Wounds and Demons'. First Thessalonians 5, verses 23 and 24, I'm going to read it, as I have been reading each night, from the New King James Version, and then I want to read it from a paraphrase which I find very helpful. *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it"*. Now listen to this paraphrase, listen carefully: *"May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together - spirit, soul, and body - and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!"*. Amen.

Let's pray together, and practice the Lord's presence with us now - by faith invoke that mighty Presence. If there is a heaviness on you, there certainly has been a heaviness on me today, let's claim the victory that we have in the Lord Jesus. Let's do that together, don't you leave me up here praying all by myself - come and pray with me now, pray for me, pray for one another, but I would ask you again: pray for yourself that God might speak to you tonight. If there is anything that you feel is a blockage, or an obstacle to God in your life in encountering Him, let's ask God to indicate it to you tonight, to diagnose your problem, and to minister to you by His Holy Spirit. So let's come now.

Abba Father, we come to You in that name that is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ. As we have sung tonight, we would proclaim again: Jesus, the name high over all in hell, or Earth, or sky; angels and men before it fall, and devils fear and fly. We thank You, Lord, for the victory that there is in Jesus' name. We thank You that the disciples could return to our Lord and say: 'Even the demons are subject to us in Your name'. Yet, our Father, we don't rejoice in that tonight, but we rejoice nevertheless in

the fact that our names are written in heaven. Lord, we're not going to be demon-conscious tonight, we thank You that we are Christ-conscious. We're conscious of the presence of Almighty God with us and, Lord, we pray tonight that Your presence would be so real and so dense that any other ungodly presences would be chased from this place, and indeed would be driven away and expelled from our very lives. O Spirit of Faith and Love, come to our hearts we pray, baptise us with power today - come Lord, come Holy Spirit, come Lord Jesus Christ, come! Come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel. We thank You that You're here, Lord, and we believe You're here - and we believe You're coming more closely now tonight, we believe and thank You in anticipation for what You're going to do in people's lives tonight. We thank You for the emancipation, and the liberty, and the freedom that You're going to bring to hearts and minds and souls and spirits. Oh, come to us, Lord, now. I take authority in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ over every ungodly force, even that which is working on me at this very moment. I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus to be bound, I claim the blood of the Lamb against you. (I need you to pray for me just now). Thank You Lord. We cast ourselves now upon Your mercy, in Jesus' name we claim the victory. Amen.

Obstacles to encountering God: sins, wounds and demons. Sins need to be repented of - I want you to remember this - wounds need to be healed, and demons must be cast out. There is not the same treatment for each of these problems. Let me repeat that: sins need to be repented of, wounds need to be healed, and demons need to be cast out. It is vital that there is discernment in this whole realm. You see, you need to know what your problem is. As I heard somebody say recently: the problem that you think is your problem, is usually not your problem! So you need God to put His holy finger on what the exact issue is that you're struggling with. You may be unconscious of it, and so good judgement is necessary. Of course, good judgement comes through a knowledge of the Word of God, and a certain amount of experience - discernment can come by that means. But the Bible also talks about 'the gift of discernment' as a supernatural gift, it is actually spoken of as 'the discerning of spirits'. I'm not going to go into that in depth, but save to say that we need God's guidance. We need revelation, all of us, to know what the issues of our lives are, and to know the remedy and how we can be released and freed.

Now some people think that all the problems that people could have are sin and sins. There's no doubt about it, that's probably one of our greatest problems - but take specific issues, for instance like drunkenness, or drug abuse, or sexual immorality. Some Christians take the attitude: 'Well, you just need to repent! Just confess your sins, repent of your sins, turn to Christ, and that's enough'. There is no doubt about it, we must repent of sin, and we must call sin what it is, and repentance must be made - but we ought not to be ignorant of the fact that often there can be deeper issues than just sin. People can have wounds deep in their heart, there can be footholds in their life, certain brokenness and trauma and turmoil that can allow the enemy to get deep roots in their heart - and those things need to be addressed. Some people have sought to repent, but have not been given the victory, and find themselves - though they are true, genuine Christians - continually drawn back into sinful, habitual lifestyles.

Some people think everything is a wound - and, yes, there are many wounds that can contribute significantly to the problems in our lives, but sometimes people appeal to woundedness, and it's just another way of saying: 'I'm not responsible for the way that I am, it's not my fault!'. Taking one of those aspects I've mentioned already,

alcoholism - alcoholism can become a disease, or does become a disease of course, but nevertheless we must take responsibility to repent of ungodly behaviours and actions that lead to such disorders as alcoholism and the like. Not everything is a wound, and it's not enough just to claim it.

Then some folk think everything is a demon. Now sins and wounds often are a gateway for the enemy to manipulate situations, and we will talk about that tonight - but the root issues of our problems are not always demonic. They can be psychological, emotional, physical, and even moral. You see, you can cast all the demons, or supposed demons, out that you like - but if you don't address the real problem, that person will not be freed. Even if they do get rid of a few demons, in all likelihood those demons will come back and many more. The truth of the matter is, I think that all of us can be a mixture of these issues from lesser to greater extents: sins, wounds, and demons.

So it is vital, as I've already said, that there is discernment. Let me warn you that a little knowledge is a very dangerous thing in these areas, and zeal without knowledge can do a lot of damage. There are some folk that are knowledgeable in one of these areas - either sin, or woundedness, or demonology - but they have blindspots in other areas, so that all they see is sin, all they see are wounds, all they discern are demons. We need to be very careful, that's why we need to continually cast ourselves on God, and seek God and His guidance, because the answer for each of these problems is different. Sins need to be repented of, wounds must be healed, and demons are to be expelled. You can't cast out a wound, a wound must be healed. You can't cast out a sin, a sin must be repented of. You can't heal a sin, you can't heal a demon. You can't repent of a demon, we can't repent of a wound. Sins must be repented of, wounds must be healed, demons must be expelled.

Let's deal with each of those. First of all there are sins. Repentance is vital. I mean there's a lot of preaching going on today, and it is devoid of the doctrine of repentance. I did a recent study, a very short one, concerning the commands of the Lord Jesus - and I'm continuing it if I can get round to it again - and the first command of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 4:17 was this: 'From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand''. Now, even if you've got wounds, and most of us have them; and even if you're oppressed by demons; sin must be named as sin. If there is sin in our lives, we must confess it. We must put our hands up to God and say: 'Guilty as charged!'. We must come into agreement with the plumbline of God's truth, and tell it as God says it is. You see, we've got to take responsibility for the ungodly behaviour in our lives. Maybe your problem tonight - let's not beat around the bush - is just plain black-and-white sin, and you need to confess it, you need to renounce it, you need to repent of it, change your mind and turn your heart from it to God. But here's the message of God to you: you must take responsibility for your sin!

You see, you can't say: 'The devil made me do it'. Often people make excuses - now, yes, Satan makes things very hard for us - but the fact of the matter is, no matter how hard things are because we've got our own brokenness, woundedness, and maybe the devils and all the demons of darkness are working on us, at the end of the day we are always involved in the choices that we make. We are responsible. Yes, Satan does take people captive to do his will, but we cooperate with him in that process. You see, some people just want God to zap them, they want God to fix them, they want someone to

pray for them and to solve at all - but they're not prepared to take responsibility for themselves! That's not the way it works, there are no quick fixes.

Turn with me for a moment to Acts chapter 8 verse 9, this is very instructive: 'But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God''. Listen, no matter how well God uses anyone, never put them on a pedestal - never. 'And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit' - please note, they had already received the Word of God, they were converted, but they hadn't received the fullness of the Spirit. 'For as yet', verse 16 says, 'He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus'. These were people who had believed and been baptised as believers, but had not encountered this immersion in the Holy Spirit. 'Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit'. But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you' - do you know how J.B. Phillips translates that? 'To hell with you and your money!' - that's what it means. 'To hell with you and your money, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity'. Now watch this verse: 'Then Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me''.

Now see this, in verse 22 Peter called Simon to repent of his wickedness. Did Simon the sorcerer have demonic problems? I would pretty much say he had, most likely he had - but what did Peter address? He may have been bound by the forces of darkness - Peter does say, 'You're bound by iniquity', but Peter didn't exorcise him of a demon, he simply discerned the bitterness and the wickedness and the covetousness that was there. In verse 23 he names it, and he calls him to repent in verse 22 - do you understand? I'm sure he had demonic problems, but he needed to repent of his sin and his wickedness. Now look at Simon's request in verse 24: 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me'. Do you know what he's saying? 'Oh Peter, please pray for me, fix me, fix me!' - he wanted God to fix him, but he didn't want to take personal responsibility for his sinfulness.

Now listen to what I'm saying tonight, my point is simply this: personal repentance is vital if you want to encounter God. If you want to go through with God, it will be a daily repentance. Maybe there is someone here tonight, and you have experienced that rollercoaster I've talked about on previous evenings - that you're up and down, peaks and troughs, hills and valleys, and you never seem to break through with God. Maybe it's because you're one of these perfectionists I have spoken about on previous

evenings, because you haven't succeeded perfectly, 100% completely, you throw in the towel and you give up. If you're not going to do it well, you're not going to do it at all! My friend tonight, you need to get over that. You need to realise that perseverance of the saints is made up of 10,000 new beginnings - you need to get up from where you're at, and you need to repent all over again. Listen to what Proverbs 24 says: 'The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again' - get up! That's what God says to you tonight: get up from where you are, it doesn't matter how many times you've failed, how many shipwrecks there are behind you, get up tonight!

You say: 'What's my problem? Why do I keep falling?'. Well, maybe you're too passive - do you know what that is? That's the opposite of active. You're passive, you lie back and wait for God to do it all for you. You know that, in a strange way, can come out of our upbringings at times. You know, if our Mummy has mollycoddled us, and we were spoilt rotten, and we had everything done for us - maybe we don't know what it is to be active, to push through. Even some of you men, you don't know that masculine will that presses through, and penetrates, and does things. You need to be active in this regard, and some of you - we can pray for this afterwards - need a strengthening of your human will by the divine will, the masculine will of God, that God would put into you that will and that desire to do that which is right and to repent. We all need that, of course.

Maybe some of you here tonight, that's the reason for your failure, why you find it so difficult to truly repent. Or maybe it is because, as the word of God says in Psalm 66: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me' - and that word 'regard' simply means 'cherish' or 'harbour'. If I love, if I'm embracing iniquity in my heart, not willing to let it go, I'll never encounter God! Is that your problem tonight? Repentance? Sin that needs to be repented of? That's why the writer to the Hebrews said: 'Lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with patience the race that is set before you'. John says: 'Walk in the light, as He is in the light'. You've got to choose to have God's holy light shine upon your iniquity, and show up all the specks of darkness, so that you might deal with it, and that it might go under the blood. Listen: Calvary will not cover what you will not uncover! You can go to as many people as you like to get prayer for deliverance and healing and all the rest, but you're wasting your time if you are not prepared to repent of sin.

Sins must be repented of, secondly: wounds must be healed. Wounds, you see, can be - if you like to take the analogy - an area of infection. It can be a place where sinful behaviours are rooted, or even demonic activity finds a foothold, when wounds are exploited. This is a vast subject, and I don't have time to look at any of these things in much depth, but I believe that the human being can be wounded from the very moment of conception. Now that might seem very far-fetched to some of you, but even the medical fraternity is telling us that babies in the womb are like sponges to the things in their environment around them outside - that's why mothers are encouraged to play music to their tummies, and pat their tummies, and talk to their tummies, and read stories to their tummies. They tell us now that the child can even recognise Daddy's voice when it comes out of the womb, because it heard Daddy's voice when it was in the womb.

Now, if a baby in the womb is like a sponge for positive affirmation - do you not think a child can pick up adverse circumstances? It's not just psychological, it is actually spiritual - you remember that John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth leapt because

he perceived the presence of his Redeemer, his incarnate God, in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Now he was not cognisant of it, his mind wasn't developed enough, this was not emotional, this was spiritual - it was spiritual. So, from the very moment of conception, often the circumstances of our conception can have an effect on some wounds that we can have before we even knew to know - do you understand? Before we even knew to know - if you were an unwanted pregnancy, and you suffer with rejection, is that a big surprise to you? I don't want to go too deep into this, but certainly in the formative years of our childhood there is no doubt that that is often when the most damage is done. Your human identity is in your human spirit, you're made up of spirit, soul, and body. Your soul is made up of mind, emotion, and will - but the soul only expresses your identity through thoughts, feelings and actions, but your human spirit is your identity, who you really are. If it is wounded it will show through your thoughts, through your emotions, and through your behaviour. There can be deep brokenness, fracture, bruising, and woundedness in the spirit that comes out and emanates to the soul, and then even to the body.

Some people think I'm talking some charismatic madness or something when I talk like this, but it's a well-established fact that stress contributes to becoming physically sick. Mental, emotional, and spiritual problems are often at the root of illness, physical illness. There is a minimum estimate of 50%, and you'll hear figures right as high as 75% of illnesses are psychosomatic. That does not mean they're all in your head, it means they have a mental, emotional, and spiritual cause.

Are you wounded? Many of our wounds come from our parents, it's just a fact. Our parents were meant to cover and protect us, and in fact are parents are meant to mirror God to us and point us to Heavenly Father - but if we had a father or a parent that was absent or distant, we might think God is like that, and so that's the way we relate to God: in a distant fashion. Or maybe we are afraid of a parent, and we are afraid of God now in a 'shaking in your boots' kind of way. Or maybe you had that sense of rejection, and so you feel: 'I'm unworthy to be embraced by God', or there was a lack of trust between you and a parent, or you tried to earn their favour - and you just don't feel accepted by God because you had a conditional relationship with Mum and Dad, and you feel you have to earn God's favour. Maybe you had a domineering mother - don't say 'Amen' to that in the meeting now! There would be too many Amens! A domineering mother - and you fear being controlled, because you were controlled by her. Maybe you were never taught true love - I meet so many people who were never shown true love by their Mum and Dad, and so they don't know what it is, and they don't even know how to receive it when God shows it.

Have you been wounded by parents, or other relationships perhaps? Often there are heart ties that need to be severed, they're still intact. Maybe it's an abuser, maybe it's a disordered love, some relationship that was idolatrous where your heart was bent toward another - and it may not have been a wrong relationship, it might even be your marriage where you have a wrong, disordered love - an affection toward your spouse whereby, if anything happened to them, you couldn't live. Now I know the awful pain of what it must be to sorrow and to lose a loved one, but what I'm talking about is when your self-worth, and your esteem, and your being is found in another human, rather than God - that's when woundedness happens. You see, when we have these ties and they are not dealt with, even past relationships can harm us, even relationships that have finished.

Another way, commonly, that we can be wounded is through trauma. People can get stuck in the tragedy of the past. They need healing from memories that haunt them, they need release, and they need to give their pain over to Jesus. Isn't it wonderful that we have got a Saviour who is a complete Saviour? He is a Saviour, He is a Redeemer, He is a Healer, and He is a Deliverer - and by His stripes we are healed! Martyn Lloyd-Jones, that great preacher, and also a Harley Street specialist, a physician - in 1930s Wales he was preaching on one occasion, and two ministers came to him and asked would he visit their local schoolmaster who was once active in Christian work, but they now described him as 'a tragic case'. When asked what was wrong, the two ministers replied: 'He has some depressed condition. He gets headaches and pains in his stomach'. So Lloyd-Jones agreed that he would go and visit this man if he could help him at all.

So Lloyd-Jones visited the schoolmaster, and he went in and asked him what his condition was. He described it just as the ministers: he had a depressive condition, he got these severe headaches and pains in his stomach, and he couldn't sleep at night as a consequence. Lloyd-Jones asked him: 'How long have you been like this?'. 'Oh', he said, 'I've been like this for years, in fact I've been like this since 1915' - remember this was 1930. So Lloyd-Jones asked him - like the doctor he was - 'How did this begin?'. The man began to describe how war broke out in 1914, and he volunteered early for the Navy. Not long after volunteering he was transferred to a submarine, and that submarine was then sent to the Mediterranean and was involved in the Gallipoli Campaign. He says: 'One afternoon we were submerged in the water, and there was this terrible thud. The submarine shook, we had hit a mine, and down we sank to the bottom of the Mediterranean'. He said: 'You know, from that moment I've never been the same man'.

Dr Lloyd-Jones said: 'Well, would you please tell me the rest of the story?'. The man replied: 'There isn't any more to tell, that's it!'. Lloyd-Jones said: 'But please, elaborate on how the story ended'. He said: 'No, I've told you all there is to tell you'. Several times this went like a ping-pong ball between them, and eventually Lloyd-Jones decided: 'Look, let's go over the scene again. The submarine got a thud, it was a mine, it sunk to the bottom of the Mediterranean - now, tell me what happened?'. The man was exasperated, he said: 'Nothing happened! That is the end of the story!'. This is what Lloyd Jones retorted: 'Sir, are you still stuck at the bottom of the Mediterranean?'. You know, he was. He wasn't physically, obviously, but mentally, emotionally, and I would say spiritually, that man was stuck. Praise God, that afternoon that man was released and set free - are you stuck in a memory, a wound?

Another big source of wounds is unforgiveness, and I'll deal with it a bit later when I talk about the demonic - but all of these: parents, relationships, trauma, unforgiveness, they can make us weak to resist sin. You can shout 'Repent', all you like, but a lot of these wounds are a foothold for the enemy that he exploits even with demonic power. You need healed if you've got wounds, you need healed!

Sins must be repented of, wounds must be healed, and thirdly: demons must be expelled. One of the marks of the Kingdom of God was in Mark 16:17: 'These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues'. Now 'demons' gets people all uptight, and afraid, and scared, and Christians start fighting with one another - and when a boy like me talks about demonic things in relation to Christians and in a Christian context, people get appalled.

Listen, let me explain the demonic very simply to you: just as the Holy Spirit empowers godly choices and godly behaviour - i.e. you obey the word of God, take it by faith, the Holy Spirit will back you up in doing that which is right - when you make ungodly choices, when you step from under the covering and protection of godliness and righteousness and obedience, it is the enemy of our souls who will power that behaviour. He seeks to do it. When we make ungodly choices, he wants to empower us in those choices - and the way he does it is by demonic power. So just think of the demonic spirits as empowering forces - and that is often what makes it so difficult for people to overcome ungodly, sinful behaviours, because there is a demonic power behind it, especially if they have brought coping mechanisms into their life to try and ease a wound. Maybe it's not just a sin is the problem, but it's a wound - and they're drinking to dull the pain, or taking drugs, or they're eating too much, or starving themselves, or bingeing and purging.

This is what makes the thing so difficult - it's not as simple as to say everything is a sin, everything is a wound, everything is a demon. So many people are a conglomeration, a hodgepodge of all of these tied up and entangled. The devil knows what he's doing - and this applies to Christians. Please don't walk out just yet! I'm not saying that Christians can be possessed, which means 'owned', by the devil. I'm not saying that. Possession gives the idea of ownership - what I'm talking about is demonic influence or 'demonisation'. Demonisation can go on a scale from just oppressive thoughts that come to your mind - which, if you're a Christian, you will have, and if you don't have them I would question if you're even a Christian - oppressive thoughts. 'Fiery darts', Paul calls them, 'from the enemy' - those are demonic spirits planting things in your head. So they can get into your head, what you do with them is a different thing, but they can get into your head. It can go on to the scale of Christians who are oppressed to such an extent that their actual behaviour is being dictated to by spirits of fear and all sorts of demonic powers.

I know this is new to many people, but I would just point you to the New Testament, and the overwhelming material in the New Testament warns Christians of the works of Satan. 'Do not be ignorant of his devices. Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour'. Paul said in Ephesians 6 verse 12: 'We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' - and all these things were written to Christians to tell them to beware of the devil, and to beware of demonic spirits! Why, if you're not susceptible to them?

Now this really does confuse me: how believers think that they can struggle with sin - and they do, for all of us struggle with temptation - and how they believe that they can struggle with the world and the flesh, but they think that they are immune to the demonic! How can that be? You say: 'If a child of God is washed in the blood, a demon can't touch them'. Well then, can sin not touch you? Can the world not touch you? Can your own flesh not touch you, because you're washed in the blood? Why is it that we apply these things to everything but the demonic realm? Yet all the material in the New Testament warns us as Christians that if we don't walk in the light, if we don't obey the Lord, if we go into enemy territory, into the kingdom of darkness, we will be delivered to him! Paul even used that terminology on one occasion of a believer: 'Deliver such a one to Satan' - put him out of the church, let Satan have his way with him, that his soul, his spirit, might be saved in the last day.

I'm not wanting to frighten you, but I want you to get real with the Bible. How can that happen? When we give Satan a right in our lives by the choices we make, Satan is a legalist and if he gets a legal right he will take that ground, and he will set up camp in your life. I know, because I've experienced it myself. The problem I would have struggled with all my life was a spirit of fear - and many of you have problems with it. But God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind - why would you want something that the devil gives you? But, you see, you've given him a right to be there, because he plants a seed thought in your head - a lie - and then what do you do? You latch onto it, and you effectively put your faith in that lie, and you start to believe what he says about you, about your circumstances, about the world around you - and before you know it, you've given him ground, and he's taken your head off! He's driving you mad.

For some people it's pornography. If you dabble in pornography, more than likely you are a prey to the demonic. You would be surprised at the Christians who are also dabbling in the darkness of occult and false religion, or taking blood oaths upon themselves in the Masonic, and the Black, and the Orange, and all sorts of institutions. They don't realise what they're doing: swearing to cut out their tongue if they divulge the secrets, taking blood oaths upon themselves that even affect their families. You might think I'm off my rocker, and I'm trying to scare you tonight - I'm not trying to scare you! As Corrie Ten Boom said: 'Fear of demons comes from the demons themselves'. I preached on Monday night that we must not deny the demonic, we must face it and deal with it - but we must not fear it wrongly, we must not unnecessarily focus on it - we must practice the presence of God, rather than practising the presence of darkness. But let us not be in unbelief about the devil and his kingdom, and let us waken up and open our eyes to know that the church is bound by doctrines of demons! The word of God teaches that, so if you can't hack that - well, that's your problem, you go and sort it out with God and the word, but that's what the Bible says. Especially in the last days, the church will be given over by doctrines of devils.

Demons can gain entry and access and influence over all our lives, as I said, if we dabble in the occult - that's obvious. But, you know, Christians at times - and you might find this doesn't fit in with your theological framework - but Christians at times who have dabbled in the occult before their conversion, can still be affected after their conversion. I haven't got time to go into a theological discourse on that, why that's possible - but it is. Then some Christians, many in fact, are consulting alternative medicine practitioners. Many of the practices have dubious origins in Chinese Eastern mysticism and devil worship - and they're finding that they're not getting better, they're getting worse. Even Christians go to some man or woman in the country who is gifted in charming away warts, or arthritis, or something else, and they think there's no harm in it - and there's a curse. Listen to what Proverbs 26 verse 2 says: 'A curse without a cause cannot alight'. You're maybe here tonight, and you know that you're under demonic oppression. Will you admit, or will you allow the Holy Spirit of God to reveal what the issue is? Will you deal with it tonight?

You know, there's another phenomenon in the Scripture which is equally controversial, called generational iniquity. It's not generational guilt, people misunderstand this - and some, perhaps, have taken this to an extreme. The Bible clearly says in Ezekiel chapter 18 that 'the soul that sins, it shall die'. You're not guilty for your father's sins, or your child's sins - everyone of us will stand before the Great White Throne and answer for

his own sins. You're not guilty for the sins of your forefathers - but we're not talking about guilt. Generational iniquity is the bentness that comes through the consequences of passed down sins. Look with me at Exodus chapter 34 verse 6, God is revealing Himself to Moses - this isn't old covenant, this is God's character - verse 6: 'The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth'', can I ask you: is that still relevant to God today? Yes. 'Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin', does He still do that? Yes. 'By no means clearing the guilty', is that true? 'Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation' - oh, but He doesn't do that any more? Now, how do you work that out? This is part of His character. We are not saying that we are guilty for our forefather's sins, what we are saying is that the consequences of what our forefathers have done can affect us. That's common sense: the prophets were noteworthy, confessing the sins of Israel, and Judah the sins of their forefathers. It wasn't that they were guilty of those sins, but they had effect upon them in the present.

Now we all know that there are hereditary traits in the physical realm - you've got your Daddy's ears, dear help you, or your Daddy's eyes, or your Mummy's hair, or whatever - we see that in the physical, why is it not the case in the spiritual? Well, it is, look at this verse 7: 'He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation' - there are consequences for our sin. It doesn't just apply to sin, it also applies to blessing. Deuteronomy 7 says: 'Know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments'. So He visits iniquity to the third and fourth generation, but isn't He such a wonderful God: He visits blessing to a thousand generations. If you have been brought up in a Christian home, you know the blessing that it has been to be born in a Christian home. You're not trying to tell me that there has been no consequences for your mother and your father's faith - there has been. That's all that we are saying. Yet there are spiritual consequences that can be passed down succeeding generations - Romans 1, even nationally, people who once knew God: their foolish heart was darkened, and they suppressed the knowledge of God in their iniquity, and so succeeding generations were given up by God. Romans 1, this is even national.

There are consequences for the sins of preceding generations - our ancestors. In fact Peter says: the blood of the Lamb, it delivers us from the vain tradition of our fathers, the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors. That can be tradition, it can be family traits, it can be sins, it can be demonic influences, it can be curses - and these lineages make us more susceptible to that influence, that's all we're saying, and it needs to be faced. It needs to be faced and it needs to be dealt with. One of the biggest curses of all is Freemasonry. If your father or your grandfather, or anybody that you know and remember was in it, you would need to get prayer for that. I'm not saying it has to have had a consequence on you, but you get prayer for it anyway. You've no idea the curse of Freemasonry that worships a false god.

I'm almost finished tonight. I don't want you to do a post-mortem this evening, an introspective post-mortem. If God witnesses that there is a problem that is an obstacle for you getting through to God in the realm of sin, in the realm of wounds, or in the realm of the demonic - deal with it. Don't go looking for it, but if God the Holy Spirit has flagged something up - don't invent something - but if He has shown you

something, you need to deal with it tonight. One of the biggest areas is unforgiveness, unforgiveness in Christians. You say Christians can't be affected by the demonic? Wait till I tell you: some of the most bitter, twisted, crooked Christians I have met are people who are unforgiving. Something was done to them, they have a chip on their shoulder - but I'm telling you: that's more than just human mental or emotional bitterness, it's demonic. It's demonic. Paul said 2 Corinthians 2:10-11: 'I have forgiven that one', that was the one he delivered to Satan. He repented, he came back into the church, and Paul says: 'Now, I've forgiven that one, you forgive him for Christ's sake in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage over us' - lest Satan should overreach us, overtake us - 'for we are not ignorant of his devices'.

You see, Paul knew that unforgiveness will give ground to Satan to oppress us. In fact, our Lord Himself in Matthew 18 told the parable about the master. You remember he forgave a man a small debt, you remember the unforgiving servant? That servant went out, having been forgiven, and he found a friend of his that owed him an even smaller amount of money. The man who owed him a smaller amount of money begged that he would be forgiven, that the slate would be wiped clean - and that man that had been so gratuitously forgiven by his master, he grabbed him by the throat, and he said 'If you don't pay me every penny, you will be imprisoned and your family will be taken off you'. The master heard about his unforgiveness, and he commanded that that unforgiving servant, who had been forgiven himself, would be cast into prison - and listen to what Jesus says: 'the master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses'.

Our Heavenly Father will do what? He will deliver you to the torturers until you pay every penny. Who are the torturers? I believe they are demonic spirits that overwhelm those who have unforgiveness in their hearts, Christians - yes, Christians who are tortured. Do you know any tortured Christians? Is God torturing them? Are they torturing themselves? Some of them might be, but a lot of them aren't - I know for a fact a lot of them aren't. The thoughts that come into their minds are things that they wouldn't even conceive of, even though their heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. My friend, we need to waken up here and if there is unforgiveness in your heart - and wait till I tell you, churches in Ulster are filled with it. If you want to talk about generational iniquity, we have heaped generation, upon generation, upon generation of sins in the church. I'll tell you something: do you see churches that have any age behind them and history? They have an awful lot that needs to be dealt with, an awful lot that needs to be brought into the light and repented of, and cleansed, and they need to be delivered from it. Just as individuals need delivered, churches need delivered, organisations need delivered.

I don't want to put things in your head tonight, but maybe you have been experiencing backseat drivers in your Christian experience. Every now and again they reach over the shoulder, and they yank the wheel in a different direction, and they're hindering you moving on. Is it not time that you ordered those empowering influences out of your life? What are the obstacles? A sin? A wound? A demon? For some of you it's probably all three.

I want finally to turn to Acts 19 verse 11. The Apostles are in a place called Ephesus, and there's great miraculous things happening. Verse 11: 'Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from

his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them'. Isn't that interesting? There is a link there - not always between disease and evil spirits, I'm not suggesting that for one moment, but sometimes there can be. Then we see, I'll not read it, some itinerant Jewish exorcists - people who saw Paul and the apostles casting devils out of people - and they saw the way they did it, and they tried to practice it. The demons spoke out of the people and said: 'Jesus we know, and Paul we know; but who are you?' - and then they were beat up, they were beat up by the people with the demons in them. Look down a bit at verse 17, what happens then? 'This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified' - that's what we're interested in tonight! We're not giving glory to Satan: Jesus is stronger than Satan, and Satan to Jesus must bow. But look at verse 18: 'And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds'. The English Standard Version translates verse 18 like this: 'Also many of those who were now believers came' - they were already saved, but they still had to come 'confessing and divulging their practices'.

Now a lot of folk here in Northern Ireland can't take this in - but if you have ever been to the mission field and you have been a missionary, this is second-hand to you, you know this. Believers can confess Christ, and then fall back into pagan practices and even witchcraft. Look at what happens here, continue in verse 19: 'Also, many of those', these are believers now, 'who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totalled fifty thousand pieces of silver'. Now let me do a couple of calculations for you, 50,000 drachma that is - a piece of silver was a drachma, and one drachma was equivalent to a day's wage in this day and era. Now I googled - I don't know if it's true or not, don't fall out with me - what a day's wage was in the United Kingdom. I found out that it was £95 - now that might be a long way off from yours, but let's say it is. You multiply that £95, equivalent of a day's wage today, with 50,000 drachmas, a day's wage then - and do you know what you get? £4,750,000 - that's what these believers were willing to sacrifice to get free, to encounter God.

Look at what happened in verse 20: 'So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed'. There was a cost, you know there was a riot in Ephesus because of all this - but after the riots there was revival. What hinders you? Let us pray.

Now I want there to be quietness. Let me just encourage you - and I hope I'm not overly dramatic, I don't feel I am - but I asked special prayer at the beginning because I felt a migraine coming on, and when a migraine comes on I start to get that I can't see too well - but it's gone! If it was a genuine migraine coming on, which it usually is when I start to see lights in front of my eyes - it went. Now God is here tonight, He's been here every night, but I don't believe in coincidence - and I don't believe that you're here on the wrong night. I know for a fact some of you are here on the right night, because I know some of you. But all of us have been damaged by the fall, and usually Satan has got inroads on all of us in some shape or form. I'm going to ask you tonight to deal with God where you are. We wouldn't have the ability, let alone the time to deal with everybody here. Having said that, we want to welcome you - the prayer team is here, the pastor and myself - if you have a very severe problem and you want to come for help, we don't want to put you off, we will stay as long as it takes. But you can deal with God tonight. If you have a sin that needs to be repented of, you have a deep wound that needs healed, maybe a memory that you need released from - you're stuck in the past, your human spirit is stuck, maybe bits of you

are stuck in different awful dramatic experiences that have peppered your life. Maybe you're aware of a demonic oppression in the mind, or in the emotions, or in the very spirit.

Would you stand to your feet just now as we come in prayer, and don't be ashamed - I'm already standing, otherwise I would be standing, because I need everything God has for me. I need everything continually, I need to continually claim deliverance as the enemy attacks - even tonight. Sure, look, we're in the battle! This isn't a picnic, this is real. If you're sitting there and your theology doesn't even allow you to go and approach this subject, you be very careful - because you could be overrun yourself in ignorance and in presumption. I invite you to stand, those of you who want to deal with those obstacles from encountering God. Just stand now in the quietness while every head is bowed and every eye is closed, stand. God bless those that are standing. You don't have to stand, this isn't a spectator thing, we're not looking at who's standing and who's not - but in the presence of God it's a healthy thing to demonstrate your desire.

Now, if there is a sin to be repented of, repent - and it would be good to take it on your lips, the person beside you doesn't need to hear a thing, you don't even need to hear it yourself - but it's good just to mouth, to mouth your confession and repentance and renunciation. Just say: 'Lord, I repent of', whatever, 'I confess, I renounce it, and I ask You to deliver me now'. If there is a deep wound, say: 'Lord, please come with me now to this memory. Come with me now to this pain in my heart'. He is the Eternal One, He can go back in time, He is back in time and He is in the future - it's no problem to Him. Ask Him to go with you now to that memory, to that trauma, and ask Him to release you from the power of it and the pain of it, to heal you. See Him there, you need to see Him with the eyes of your heart right there. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the Holy Spirit could take you right back to the womb, and release you from rejection that you felt there. Maybe you were adopted and you need to be released from a sense of rejection and orphanhood. Maybe you need healed from the skewed vision of God that you were given by a parent who was absentee, or left you, or just wasn't everything that he or she should have been. Maybe you need released from the fear of control - ask for healing.

Do you need released from demonic oppression? Do you need to forgive someone? Speak out that forgiveness now on your lips now, say it now: 'By an act of my will', say it now, 'I choose to forgive', and name the person or people - if you're like me, you'll have a long list. 'I choose to forgive as an act of my will' - you mightn't feel like it, you probably won't. We're not saying that right is wrong, and you have to feel great about the person or what they did, we're not saying that. We're saying you're letting them off your hook, and putting them onto God's. You're getting out of the way, and letting God be God. Say: 'I choose, as an act of my will, to forgive', so and so, 'I release all bitterness and resentment to You, Lord. Heal my damaged emotions, and bless', and name the person, 'Bless them and set me free'.

Maybe there's a genealogical thing. People say: 'Oh, my Mummy was a worrier, my Granny was a worrier - and I'm just a worrier'. Worry is sin, and fear has an awful spirit behind it. Why not ask the Lord Jesus Christ, where you are now, to cut you off from any influence from your mother and father's line that has come down to you. If there is Masonic there, you ask the Lord Jesus by the power of blood, and the sword of His word, to cut you off from it and to set you free from any of the consequences of

the misdeeds of your forefathers. If you have dealt in the occult at all, confess it and say: 'I renounce Satan and all his works. Set me free by the blood of the Lamb'.

Now Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You that You have heard the confessions, the repentance, the renunciation, and the faith - You have seen the faith, even the faith to stand here tonight, the faith to speak out prayer and renunciation. Lord, I thank You that You have heard on high. Lord, we call You to record now to come to the aid and in answer to the promise: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered' - that You will cut off the ties of ungodliness, that You will release people from sins that have bound them and caused them constant defeat. Loose them and let them go now, Lord. Heal deep wounds of trauma and pain from childhood, and even conception Lord. Heal deep wounds of unforgiveness. Pour in the oil and wine. Blessed nail-pierced hand that was slain for us, touch the spirit, bind up the brokenhearted and heal their wounds. Lord Jesus Christ, who spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross - I call upon You now to come and release those who have been bound by the enemy and his minions. Lord Jesus, set them free, set them free from a depressive mind, set them free from a fear-ridden heart, set them free from the blockage that is preventing them going through with God. Lift the curse, for You were made a curse for us on the cross. Oh Lord, we claim the victory of Your blood tonight, and we thank You for what You have done. We claim it by faith, and we thank You, believing that we have received the things that we have asked according to Your will. We give You the praise, and we give You the glory. Now Lord, seal up everything that these folk have received, and let nothing be lost or snatched by the enemy. Give Your angels charge over us to keep us in Your way. Amen.

Encountering God - Chapter 6

"Gifts And Fruit - The Outcome Of Encountering God"

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by David Legge*

Tonight I want us to consider the outcome, or some outcomes to encountering God. I want us to look at the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So we're turning to Ephesians chapter 4 - I'm a very dry preacher, so they've left me a bottle! Most of the time you get a cup, but I got a bottle! Ephesians 4 verses 7 and 8 - we'll be looking at other scriptures, but we'll just use these as a launching pad for the subject tonight. Ephesians 4:7-8: *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men'"*.

Let us pray - and as I've invited you on previous nights, do pray for yourself that God will speak to you. Pray for me. Pray for one another - but I would ask that you would specifically pray for your own heart, that God might communicate to you. Make sure you have an open heart. Some of you may have preconceived ideas about this subject, you may have your own theology, and I have mine - and have had different types over the years - but you need to come before the Lord with an open heart and an open mind. There's nothing wrong with that, I trust you believe that - just come and ask the Lord to speak to you, and maybe, just perhaps, there might be something for you to learn this evening. I'm always learning, continually learning - so come with an open heart to the Lord now, and let us practice the presence of God as we've been thinking about. We've already sensed Him with us, but let's come present to the presence of God, and by faith enter in deeper and further into His great manifest presence that He wants to just let loose upon us tonight in this place.

Heavenly Father, dear Father, Abba Father, we come to You in that all-victorious glorious name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can echo Wesley's sentiment when he says: 'O, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!'. Thank You for those in the meeting tonight that can say, and even from last evening can testify: 'Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease; 'tis music to the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace'. We thank You, Father, for the completeness of the Gospel message, we thank You for full salvation, we thank You that there is nothing that we need that has not been purchased for us through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus, and that we can know now by the power of His resurrection and the outpouring of His Spirit at Pentecost. Thank You, Lord - and yet, Lord, we don't want to be in the realms of conception tonight regarding these truths, but we want to come into the experience of them. Lord, we want to encounter God, we say to You tonight collectively and individually: Lord, we want all that You have for us, we want all that our redemption has bought for us, we want everything that is in heaven with our name on it and with the promises of God toward us, which are 'Yes and Amen' in our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we ask that You will rebuke the enemy tonight, that you will cut off the influence of principalities and powers and ungodly dark spirits in this place. We say to them just

now: 'The Lord rebuke you, we overcome you by the blood of the Lamb, and by the confession of what the blood of the Lamb does for us'. Lord, we pray that Your victory, O Lord, that Your victory would prevail tonight, and people would be set free from bondages, and enter into Canaan land, and go deeper with God than they have ever done before. Lord, we want You to do things tonight, we want there to be signs following the preaching of the Word, we want there to be that apostolic experience, where it says that: 'They went forth, the Lord working with them, confirming the Word with signs following'. So come Lord, we invite You, we say from our heart: come Holy Spirit, come Lord Jesus. We welcome You, we invite You into our lives, to this place, to have Your way, to do what You will. For the glory of Christ we pray, Amen.

The picture that Paul gives us here in Ephesians chapter 4, of course he's quoting the Psalms, but the picture is of a military leader returning home at the head of his army after routing enemy troops, after a great triumph and victory, and he has taken many prisoners in his train. As he entered his home town, the victory is celebrated, there's a great welcome. Then the commander-in-chief, if you like, he shares his spoils of battle with his own people - he gives gifts as tokens of his victory. This, of course, is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ - having been crucified for our sins, according to the Scriptures, buried, risen again the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended on high, the great angelic throng welcomed Him: 'Lift up your heads, O you gates! Be lifted up, you everlasting doors! For the King of glory shall come in'. You know, when the Lord Jesus returned to Heaven after the triumph of Calvary and the empty tomb, the Bible says He spoiled principalities and powers, He stripped the enemy of his kingdom power, the kingdom of darkness, but also He distributed gifts to His own people.

What a wonderful picture it is, isn't it? In John 7, and I quoted this on Wednesday evening, Jesus said: 'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'. But this He spoke', John comments, 'concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified'. But now that He has led captivity captive, He has given gifts to men, the Holy Spirit has been poured out at Pentecost, and He has shared the tokens of His triumph with the church. Indeed, in John 14:12 the Lord Jesus said: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father'. He has gone to His Father, so the great works of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit can be known and seen among men. Isn't it wonderful? All because of the victory of Calvary, all because of the blood of the Lamb - it's because of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Some people criticise preaching on the Holy Spirit, and they say: 'You should be talking about Christ! You should be Christocentric' - Christ-centred. Yes you should, and we are, I hope, in these meetings shining the spotlight on the Lord Jesus, because it's all about Him, it's all about what He's done, it's all about His glorious triumph - and yet He said that: 'The One I will send of the same kind, another I will send to you, He will testify of Me'. It is impossible to know the witness of Jesus Christ to our minds and our hearts, the witness of Jesus to us and the witness of Christ in us, without the power of the Holy Spirit. We give all glory to Jesus, but we must realise the instrumentality of how His life can be known now in us.

After Pentecost I believe the New Testament teaches that God's presence was manifest to the church in at least two ways. First of all: gifts, gifts of the Holy Spirit; and fruit,

fruit of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit really are demonstrations of God's power. Power belongs unto God, and these gifts that we will talk about a little bit tonight are demonstrations, indeed manifestations, that God is in the midst of His people. I said on a previous night, I think it was Monday, that it has always been the heartbeat and passion of God to dwell, manifestly so, amongst His people. The fruit of the Spirit, if you like, is God's personality. If the gifts are God's power, fruit is God's personality - or, to put it another way: the gifts are Divine communication, but the fruit of the Spirit is Divine character, God's character in us.

Now, right away it ought to be obvious that Christianity is a supernatural way of life. We have laboured this night after night: it is not our life at all, it cannot be - indeed, it is an utter impossibility to live the Christian life. Many of you perhaps are struggling and failing, because you're trying to do it in your own strength. Paul the apostle said in Galatians 2:20: 'It is not I, but Christ who lives in me'. Some of you might be trying to live the Christian life on your own steam, or some of you - like a steam engine going down the hill - are living your Christianity on old steam. Once the pistons were firing, and the engine was going, but that was a long while away from now - things are different. The only way to live the Christian life is by the life of God Himself in us - Christ in you, the hope of glory! So His power and His character are necessary, His gifts and His fruit - and the tragedy is, I have to say, that evangelicalism, to a large extent, has divorced itself from the supernatural Source of life, the power of the Holy Spirit: His power in the gifts, and God's character in the fruit.

Now let's deal with them tonight. First of all let's look at the gifts. Now there are many gifts in the New Testament, in a sense. In fact, if we were to read further in Ephesians 4 here, you would see that there are what we call 'ministry gifts', and they are people, individuals that are gifted to the church. In verse 11 we read of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - and Paul tells us in verse 12 that these are gifted to the church by God for the equipping of the saints, for the working of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Note it doesn't say that they're given to do the work of ministry, no, no, no - we've got this all wrong. You see, you think of your pastor: 'We're paying him to do the work'. No, you're not! No, you're not! You're not paying him to do anything, you're supplying his need for being the servant of God - but what he is doing is, he ought to be equipping you (and I know he is) for you to do the works of ministry! That's what this verse says, that these gifted men and at times women were given to the church to equip the saints for them to do the work of ministry, for the edifying or the building up of the body.

So there are these ministry gifts, but there are also what we call 'spiritual gifts'. The Greek term for them is 'charisms', 'grace gifts'. God gives them, severally, as He wills - and there are probably generally thought to be nine of them. Some debate over the number of them, but generally when we look at passages of Scripture like Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, there appears to be nine general gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here they are: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts (plural) of healings, workings (plural) of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues (plural), and interpretation of tongues. Now, I don't have time to deal with those individually tonight - and I have to say that there is a great deal of confusion, even among circles that believe in these gifts, concerning the definitions of them. We won't be dealing with that in much depth tonight. All I want to highlight this evening is the sad fact that the church of Jesus Christ, that so desperately needs the manifest power and presence of God in the midst, is divided over these gifts - not least, it has to be said, because of

the abuse of these gifts in certain circles.

We need to be balanced when we are touching on these, and in certain Pentecostal and extreme charismatic circles there are abuses and aberrant practices in the name of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We do need to exercise caution when dealing with this subject, that there are counterfeit claims being made in the name of the Holy Spirit. There are some very weird manifestations that are going on, that I believe are of another spirit. But even among some circles, at best there is learned behaviour, people see a thing happening and they just copy it in the flesh; and at worst, there can be demonic infiltration in the church. But here's our problem: many evangelicals, because of error, have reacted against it in a pendulum swing and have rejected everything to do with the Holy Spirit, not least these gifts of the Spirit.

I pointed out to you on Wednesday night: Satan only counterfeits the true. Do you understand? Satan only counterfeits truth. So you should not be rejecting these gifts, rather you should be asking: 'Well, there might be false things around, but where is the true?'. Is that the question that you're asking? We would do well to note that Paul wrote two epistles to the Corinthians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and the church at Corinth was - well, we could class them as a very charismatic church, in the right sense. They were highly spiritually gifted, these 'charisms', the gifts of the Spirit, were widely operative - but Corinth was a problematic church. They had these gifts, but we know from reading the books that they were abusing them. They were also in dire need, morally. There was drunkenness around the Lord's Table, there was incest and immorality, they were taking one another to court, and they were starting to doubt the resurrection. But please note: all that was perverse that was going on in Corinth, Paul, when he addresses spiritual gifts, he doesn't even remotely say 'Your gifts are counterfeit'. He doesn't say that. In fact, though they abused these gifts - no doubt about it - Paul actually taught them how to correctly use them, and how to do all things decently and in order.

Do you see the balance of the great apostle? Satan always counterfeits the true. Maybe, as I've said on previous nights, you've throw the baby out with the bathwater. Because of excesses and extremes, and even falsehoods in certain circles, you have reacted wildly against everything to do with the gifts of the Spirit of God. I'll tell you what is obvious to me: there is an absence of Divine power in the church! If the gifts of the Spirit are the demonstration of God's power in the midst of His people, we need to waken up and ask where they are in genuine form! Is it not true that there is in the church a form of godliness denying the power? We need to realise what the apostle said, that the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power. Can I ask you: is it coincidental that this absence of power is often linked to an aversion to the ministry of the Holy Spirit? Is it a coincidence that this absence of power is often linked to a disbelief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit? I think not. We need God's power, the church needs God's power, and the church needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit!

There is no Scripture that says that these gifts are not for the church today. On the contrary, let me show you a number of passages. Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, that great sermon at Pentecost - don't worry, I'm not going to read it all! There's only one verse I want you to note, verse 39 - verse 38: 'Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call''. The

promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off - I used to think that was people in Africa, or the North or the South Pole, 'all who are afar off' - that's not what it means. It's not talking geographically, it's talking chronologically, it's saying 'to everyone that is afar off in the future' - this promise is to you and to your children, and to everyone that lies ahead that names the name of Christ, the promise of Pentecost!

What was that? 'I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh', verse 17, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy' - that's the promise to you, to your children, and to all who are afar off. Notice there were no brackets at the end of Peter's statement, there was no caveat to say: 'Now, I just need to warn you that in 150 years the power of the Holy Spirit will all be gone, and you'll have to just wing it on your own after that'. I mean it's nonsensical to suggest such a thing, isn't it? Yet that is what much Christian evangelical doctrine is espousing today. Another passage, 1 Thessalonians 5, we were there last night when we were talking about that promise in verses 23 and 24, that God is able to make you whole and holy - what a wonderful promise! But I want to direct your attention to the preceding verses, verse 19 - and it's the same Paul the apostle, you know - he says in verse 19, this is a command now: 'Do not quench the Spirit', that literally could be translated 'Do not put out the fire of the Spirit'. Look, verse 20: 'Do not despise prophecies'. Can I ask you in the meeting tonight: do you despise prophecies? Verse 21: 'Test all things', we're not to fall for everything and anything, 'Test all things; hold fast what is good' - that presupposes that you'll throw a few things out - 'Hold fast to that which is good', and verse 22, 'Abstain from every form of evil'. You could not remotely say that the apostle Paul here is telling us that we are not meant to be operating in the gifts of the Spirit, in fact to the contrary, he tells us not to despise the moving of the gifts of the Spirit. Test them, yes, throw out what is wrong, but hold on to that which is good. There is something good to be held on to.

Come again with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 14, and of course chapters 12, 13, and 14 deal with these gifts - but we're coming to the closing remarks of Paul to do with these gifts, his parting shot if you like. Verse 39: 'Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy', now watch this, this is another command, 'and do not forbid to speak with tongues', that's a command of the New Testament! Now there are certain regulating factors, if you read these passages, to do with these gifts and others - but, nevertheless, look at what it says: 'Do not forbid to speak with tongues'. Verse 40: 'Let all things be done decently and in order'. What's the New Testament teaching? I'm not asking you what your theology teaches, or what the framework that you have imposed upon Scripture teaches; I'm asking: what does a casual, superficial reading of the Word of God actually say before you poison it with your interpretation? And I've done that for years.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1, and this is a very interesting one, verse 4. Remember, this is a highly gifted church, with these gifts in particular - verse 4, Paul says: 'I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge', that's an allusion, I believe, to these gifts, 'in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you', watch verse 7, 'so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Paul is telling Corinth that the church was to exercise these gifts

while it waited for the return of the Lord - is that not what it says? They were to come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord. Has the Lord come yet? Has He?

Even 1 Corinthians 13, which many have used as a proof text to suggest that the gifts of the Spirit have ceased, 1 Corinthians 13 verse 8 says: 'Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away'. But if you read the context of this passage, you will see that Paul is saying these will not cease until there is perfect knowledge, and we know as we are known. Now I ask you tonight: do you have perfect knowledge? Do you know as God knows you? Of course, it's pointing to that perfect day when we will be with the Lord, we will see Him as He is. Even John Wesley said on this passage itself: 'Paul does not say either that these or any other miracles shall cease till faith and hope shall also cease, till they all be swallowed up in the vision of God, and love be all in all'.

I don't believe there are any scriptures that teach that these gifts are not for the church today. To the contrary, they teach the opposite. Furthermore, contrary to the opinion of some - and it was once mine - there has not been a complete suspension of the operation of these gifts in church history. You see, one objection towards these gifts is: 'Well, the great heroes of the faith down through church history, they didn't need these gifts, they didn't experience these things'. If you study church history, you will find that there is documentary evidence that says the opposite. There is evidence that these gifts were used among the early church fathers. There is evidence that they were used among the saints during the mediaeval era and the Middle Ages, even among groups called the Waldenses and the like. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther commented on the use of these gifts in his own ministry. There were even movements like the French Huguenots, among whom the gifts of the Spirit were evident. During revivalist periods, and through revival preachers, no less than John Wesley that I've already mentioned, Charles Grandison Finney, D.L. Moody, and there is even evidence of the gifts of the Spirit in the ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. It appears even that the early brethren were yearning, some of them anyway, for the operations of the Spirit in accordance with 1 Corinthians chapter 14. In fact, wherever revival took place, you find the power of God's Spirit in these special gifts.

Now, no doubt it is true that these gifts fell out of use in mainstream Christianity - but the question I ask tonight is: was their falling out of use due to God's will, or was it as a result of coldness in the church? Was it because the administration and rulership of Christ in His church by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit was replaced by man-made tradition, by clergy, by form? I think it was. It also appears that jealousy led some clerical figures to criticise the gifts of the Spirit, because they themselves didn't have them. In fact, John Wesley, in his diary on Wednesday, August 15th 1750, speaking on this subject says: 'The grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn, was not only that faith and holiness were well-nigh lost; but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them as either madness or imposture'.

Am I saying that we ought to embrace all that is done in the name of the Spirit today? A thousand, yea, a million times: no! That is not what I'm saying. What I am saying tonight, biblically based I believe, is that if we want to encounter God we must be honest with Scripture, we must be honest with church history, and we must be open to everything that God would give us by His Spirit. We cannot encounter His power whilst

at the same time resisting the very Source of that power, the Holy Spirit and His gifts. I know that I am on the rocky road, according to some - but all I have to declare tonight, and I'm not defending myself, I don't believe in defending self, but what I do have to declare tonight is: I believe everything the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. I believe everything the Bible says about the Holy Spirit.

The gifts of the Spirit, God's power, or God's Divine communication to the church. Do we need it? Then the fruit of the Spirit - and this is important, because I believe we should have more of an emphasis on the fruit of the Spirit, because character is more important to God than power. I think that's right throughout Scripture, you can see that - you can see it even in the life of characters in the Old Testament, like Samson. God's power came on him, but look at what his character was like. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, that means He can give gifts and not take them off people, even when their lives go askew. People can use gifts out of the flesh, look at the Corinthians, they were carnal - and yet they were 'charismatic'.

Now, we can ignore the gifts at our own cost, and we must not do that - but we must not exaggerate them at the expense of godly character. Character is important to God, and that's what the fruit of the Spirit is: it's character. It's an indication of the life of God in us. Fruit, of course, is an evidence of root - that the root of the plant is deep down on the ground and is drawing the life and nutrients from the Earth. So, to have the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is evidence of the life of God in us. You remember how our Lord said in John 15:16: 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you'. It's God's will that we are engrafted into the vine, and that we as a branch draw that sustenance and life from the Lord Jesus and bear much fruit to His glory.

Now the fruit of the Spirit - and again, we'll not be able to deal with these individually in any depth - but they are found in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - verses 22 and 23. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - and interestingly there's nine of them, just as there are nine gifts of the Spirit, there's nine fruit of the Spirit. But you will notice, if you look at verse 22 it says: 'The fruit of the Spirit is' - the fruit of the Spirit is. Please note it doesn't say 'the fruits', plural, 'of the Spirit'. Look at that now, it says 'the fruit', singular, 'of the Spirit'. It also says 'the fruit of the Spirit is', not 'the fruit of the Spirit are'. Now there's nine apparent fruit mentioned here, and yet it says that 'the fruit of the Spirit is', not 'the fruits of the Spirit are'. You say: 'What are you getting at?'. Well, some people have this idea: 'Well, Tom, he's got love; and James, he's got peace; and Joy, well, you know what she's got, she's got joy' - and we think of people having individual characteristics like these, but that's not what God is saying at all. This is one fruit! The fruit of the Spirit, the life of God in us, will produce all these things - because this is fruit. In fact, you could reduce this one word 'fruit' to another one word: 'character' - that's what it is, character.

Do you know something? There are people who go around, and we have to say this, running around talking about 'the gifts of the Spirit', and that God has been doing wonderful things and all the rest - but there's no character there, there's no depth. There are people who want to speak with supernatural tongues, but they won't let the Holy Spirit control their natural tongue. Character! Whose character? Whose character?

It's Jesus' character, it's the very character of the Son of God, in-wrought by the Holy Spirit in us, that will be manifest. Turn to 1 Corinthians 13, this great passage on love. You remember that love is the first thing mentioned in the fruit of the Spirit. Some actually would say, and I agree with them, that all the other descriptions of the fruit of the Spirit would come out of that love. So love is the first, but love is birthing these others, for God is love. Here we have in 1 Corinthians 13, look at verse 4: 'Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails'.

Now I want you to do something just now. Go back to verse 4 and replace the word 'love', or 'charity' if it says it in your version, with the word 'Jesus', the name 'Jesus'. Now let's read it again: 'Jesus suffers long' - what a statement! 'Jesus is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself, He is not puffed up; He does not behave rudely, He does not seek His own, He is not provoked, He thinks no evil; He does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; He bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Jesus never fails' - hallelujah! Now, go back to verse 4, put your own name in now - all right? Eh? 'David suffers long' - well, that's it, that's it over for me now! I can't suffer, can't even go to the dentist hardly! I haven't much patience - but, you see, this is what's meant to happen. You put your name there: 'David suffers long and is kind; and he loves, is not envious; does not parade himself, isn't puffed up and proud; David does not behave rudely, does not seek his own, is not provoked, does not think evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. David never fails' - what!? You see, the goal of this Gospel that we preach, God's desire is that we should be like Christ - God wants to make us like His own Son! Listen: the only life that ever pleased God was the life of His Son, that's why He rent the heavens and said: 'This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased' - and if you're going to please God, you're going to have to be in Christ, and Christ is going to have to be in you, and it's going to have to be His life that is being manifest. That's the only life that will please the Father!

This is meant to be the Christian experience, listen to 2 Corinthians 3:18, just listen: 'We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord' - this is Christianity! Not 'Read your Bible, pray every day if you want to grow, and go to your church, and walk on the clean side of the road, and keep the commandments, and say a prayer before your meal, and keep your nose clean' - friends, this is a supernatural way of life, this is the very life of God! If all you've got tonight are rules and regulations - and wait till I tell you, it's not just the old Pharisees of legalism that have their rules and regulations, there's a modern legalism that is there as well, there's a modern legalism in the more modern churches as well, where you can only do new things, and you have to have gimmicks and new programs. Friends, listen: when the life of God is there you don't need any gimmicks! You don't need entertainment! I love good singing, and we praise God for the gifts that God has given people, and we would do well to use everything that God has given people - we're not in any way pouring cold water on anything that God has given to people - but what we're saying is: we need this supernatural power, and we need this supernatural character, the very life of Jesus.

Now it's fruit, it's not works. I'm not saying works don't have a place in Christianity, but you've got to understand the difference here at least. 'Works' means effort, and mechanics, toil and labour - and the result of work is that you're weary, and you're faint, and you're sometimes frustrated because of how little ground you're making. Work is accompanied by fleshly effort, there is a great display, there is a lot of noise - but fruit isn't like that. Fruit doesn't involve work. You say: 'Oh, well, you would know you weren't a gardener!'. I'm not a gardener - God blessed me with a wife that cuts the grass, isn't that wonderful? I'm not a gardener, I don't know the first thing about it, but I know this much: the gardener is the one that does the work. God's Word says, from the mouth of Christ: 'My Father is the husbandman'. The Father is the one who does the work, Jesus did the work on the cross, Father pours His grace - He does the work. I'm not saying there's nothing for you to do, but your job - if you're going to bear fruit - is to abide in the Vine. John 15: 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing'.

I'm not saying there aren't good works, but they must come out of a fruitful abiding in the Vine. I've said it to you I don't know how many times, but I'm hoping it starting to sink in - I'm not suggesting you're a bit thick, I'm just meaning we need to repeat these things to understand them: everything in the Christian life is by grace through faith. These gifts are God's grace gifts, this fruit is the character of Jesus. It must be received through repentant faith, which is just abiding, receiving, yielding, and accepting it by faith. Just as we said on Tuesday night: bring to God your pride - and you've got it, we've all got it - bring it to Him, name it, become present to it and give it to Him; and then receive the grace, the gift of humility. It's the same with this: if you want to bear fruit, confess your sin, come believing and abide in Christ, practice His presence, get filled with the Holy Spirit, take it by faith and abide day-by-day in Jesus. It's all the difference between a factory and a garden - what a difference!

It means having no confidence in the flesh. As someone said: 'A machine can do work, but only life can produce fruit'. You see, a lot of folk are living the Christian life confident in the flesh. They've got morality, they've got self-righteousness. You're brought up in a good home, a religious home, so you maybe didn't learn to do the things that other people did - and you think it's God in your life. Maybe it's not at all. Have you got the power of God? You see, it's not just not doing bad things, it's actually being able not just to do good things but actually to encounter God. John 17 verse 3, Jesus defines eternal life like this - not, 'Well, you go to heaven when you die and you don't go to hell', although thank God that's a big part of it - but He said: 'This is eternal life, that they may know You', they may know You, 'the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent'. Eternal life is to know God, for He is eternal life - that life that was with the Father before the world was, that life that we saw and we touched, the apostle says! It is that life in us!

Why is the picture fruit and not flowers? Why isn't it flowers blossoming? Sure, that's a sign of life. Well, flowers are decorative, aren't they? You would probably set flowers on a mantelpiece, or a garland of flowers around the sash of the window before you would put bananas up there - or maybe you're a bit strange, and that's what you do? I don't know. But flowers are to decorate, aren't they? But what's fruit? It's food, it's food. I'm going to tell you something: what this world around us needs is spiritual food. They don't need decorated Christians. As John Stott said: 'The Christian is meant

to be a fruit tree, not a Christmas tree'. You might look the part and sound the part, but do you know what the starving hungry world, and the starving famine-ridden church needs? They need to feed on the character of true Christ-like Christians!

These qualities are not so that people can look at us and think how great we are, but that people hungry for God will find Him in us. You know, the Holy Spirit in us is to be like a fountain, Jesus said, welling up unto eternal life within us - but in John 7 that I've quoted so many times already this week, we are meant to allow that fountain to turn to a torrent until it overflows, and out of our innermost being comes rivers of living water. There is meant to be an outflow to other people to touch them, to minister to them, to feed them with the very life of God!

Now do you think I've got all this wrong, and it's really not for today at all? What do you think? I thought that for many years. A.J. Gordon was an American, and he told the story of another American gentleman with an Englishman, and they went to view the Niagara Whirlpool Rapids. Some of you may have been there. He said to his friend: 'Come and I will show you the greatest unused power in the world'. He took him to the foot of Niagara Falls, 'There', he said, 'is the greatest unused power in the world!'. 'Ah, no my brother, not so!', was the reply, 'The greatest unused power in the world is the Holy Spirit of the Living God'.

Let us pray. I'm not asking you your theology. I hope what I have been preaching tonight has been Bible. I'm not here to argue with you, and I would ask you to desist if you want to pick holes. It's not that I'm above contradiction, but this is not a debate. I'm not here to debate you, or argue with you - I've argued with myself long enough. That's not why these meetings are convened - but I want to ask everyone here tonight: do you not want more of God? Let me remind you of that promise that I brought to you forcibly on Wednesday night, Luke 11:13: 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'. Paul said: 'Seek earnestly the best gift'. So there is a juncture in Scripture to seek God for what we need, and what He is willing to give.

Maybe you've never been filled with the Holy Spirit. Well, will you come tonight by faith, just raw, naked faith - not looking for an experience or anything like that, just coming by faith upon the promise that God wants this for you, and that you should have it, and you need it. You need Him, the person of the Holy Spirit and His power. Maybe you've been struggling in your Christian life, maybe that's what you need to claim tonight by faith: take Him at His word, believe that you have received the things that you have asked of Him, and you will receive them. Thank God tonight for it - and there have been people breaking through upon mere faith, nothing more. Maybe it's the gifts of the Holy Spirit in power that you need, maybe it's the character that you feel is not being exhibited in your life - but the old man, that we all have, is what's coming to the surface, not the life of Christ.

Will you deal with the Lord tonight? In the quietness, while heads are bowed and eyes closed, you stand to your feet just now. Stand to your feet, and by faith engage with God that you might receive all that He has for you - if that's what you desire, stand to your feet just now. There is always more, there is always more than we have known - I'm standing. If I hadn't been in the pulpit every night, I think I'd be standing myself every night, because I need the Lord, I need more. If you've got an old Laodicean

spirit, in need of nothing, you're in big trouble - that means the Lord's outside your life, it means the Lord's outside your church.

Now you deal with God, bring to Him your need, but you must engage with Him by faith. He gives these precious things by grace, but you must receive by faith. So you take God at His word - does He want this for you? Does He want you filled? Does He want you gifted? Does He want your character to be the character of Jesus? Yes, He does! So, you take Him at His word, and say: 'Lord, this is Your promise, and in Jesus' name I ask You, and I believe that I receive the things according to Your will that I ask of You. I thank You, Lord, that You have heard me. I thank You, Lord, that You have heard me, and I receive'. Drink in those rivers of living water tonight: 'I receive now, I receive, Lord, what You have for me'. Even in this church, folk belonging to this church, God is doing something in your midst - O, don't you be working against it now. Don't you be just stuck in the mud and lukewarm, neither for it nor against it, just sitting back and observing. I'm not saying you don't have to assess things - test all things, prove what is good, reject every form of evil - but listen: God, I believe, has demonstrated through your pastor's ministry and in bygone years in this place, where His blessing rests - and this week we have known it. God is doing, I believe, a new thing - but He'll not do it without His Spirit.

Now Father, I pray for these people, Christian leaders and ministers, and - like myself - folk who are groping for more of You, Lord, just thirsty and hungry for more. We know there is much much more, and yet there are young people, and there are folk who feel they are maybe backslidden and they're cold, and, Lord, they don't know where to turn next. They may have issues, but they know that there must be more than this. Lord, they're coming to You. I pray now that they will just get that gift of faith to know that You have heard them, Lord, that You have heard them. Lord, there are folk and they feel that they have been washed up, and they have been sent out to grass, and they maybe have nothing more to do - Lord, touch them. There are folk who need healing tonight, Lord, O that You would touch them, restore the years that the locusts have eaten. I see You, Lord, with the eyes of the spirit, at the right hand of the Father, Our Great High Priest, our Prince and Saviour, and You have given gifts to men. Lord, pour out Your blessing, pour out Your power, Lord Jesus Christ - pour out Your very life in us and in this church. O Lord may this be a sanctuary, a temple of the power and personality of Almighty God. I repent again for, Lord, denying Your power. Thank You, Lord, that You're forgiving, You're merciful. O Lord, come tonight to people, and give them the witness that the Comforter has come. May they take it by faith alone, but may You give them a witness that the fire has fallen. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.

Encountering God - Chapter 7

"Revival - A Community Encountering God"

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I want you to turn with me tonight to Psalm 24, please. I'm sure there's something I forgot to say that I meant to say, so forgive me. Now please don't fall asleep tonight. If you're warm take your coat off or your tie off - we'll forgive you if you take your tie off, but don't take any more off! If you need to get comfortable, do - we don't want anybody to feel stifled tonight in the meeting. We started last Sunday evening on 'The Call to Encounter God', the series of course has been entitled 'Encountering God'. 'The Call to Encounter God' is 'The Cost of Discipleship' - there is a cost to encounter the Lord. A lot of people want to experience God, but they're not prepared to pay the price. That's what we thought about on Sunday evening. On Monday night was 'The Atmosphere of Encountering God', 'Practising the Presence of God' - and we can be practising another presence, and we hit a whole lot of things we can be practising the presence of and not practising the presence of God. On Tuesday night we looked at 'The Condition of Encountering God', which is humility, not pride but humility. On Wednesday night we looked at 'The Energy of Encountering God', the power of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. On Thursday night we looked at some 'Obstacles to Encountering God' - if you're not getting through to this blessed life, why? We looked at 'Sins, Wounds, and Demons', and how many of us are a combination of all those three things. Then on Friday night we had a night where we looked at 'The Outcome of Encountering God', which was the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

Tonight we're looking at 'A Community Encountering God', which is just another description of 'Revival' - 'A Community Encountering God'. Verse 3 of Psalm 24: *"Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face".*

Let us pray. As we pray, as I have requested each night, I want you to ask the Lord to speak to you individually. Do pray for me and pray for those around you, but pray personally for yourself that God might meet you and deal with your life. Let's practice the presence of God together as we invoke, by faith, a very real sense of His reality here now. Let's pray: Father, we come to You as the Holy and the Lofty One. We say with the psalmist at the beginning of this Psalm: 'The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters'. We thank You that our Saviour has ascended on high, we thank You that He has led captivity captive and given gifts to men. We thank You that that angelic throng, and You, our Heavenly Father, have welcomed Him to glory as the resurrected, glorified Lord: 'Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of

glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle'. Lord, we want to join the throngs of Heaven here on Earth, we want to join in with the communion of the saints, with those spirits made perfect gathered around the glassy sea, as they sing unto the Lamb that was slain and has redeemed by His blood out of every tribe, tongue, kindred, people and nation. Lord, we pray that, as it were, Heaven and earth would unite tonight, and the very atmosphere of Heaven would come down to us. By faith, Lord, we would engage in order to invoke that as personal experience. Lord, we want the atmosphere of eternity to invade this space now. Lord, we want to encounter You, the Living God. So, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we say: come Holy Spirit, come to us Lord Jesus by Your Spirit. We thank You for the victory that the Lord Jesus wrought over principalities and powers, the rulers in heavenly places, those dark spirits. Lord, in the name of Jesus, we ask that You will rebuke them, You will cut off the influence of them in this place; and, Lord, that You will give great victory tonight for Your glory. Come now Lord, take a dealing with our lives, in the name of the Lord Jesus we ask it, Amen.

I've been encouraging you these nights to be real. We need to be real, we need to be real with ourselves, we need to be real with each other, we need to be real - primarily - with God. Transparency and truth is important. I did highlight that grace and truth come together. So if you want the grace of God to meet you, you have to be truthful. I'm going to be truthful now about something I believe is a real problem in our own province, and particularly in the Western world. There is an increasing discontent and hunger among Christian people. I'm not talking about naysayers - they will always be with you, the Sanballats and the Tobiahs, when you're trying to build something they're wanting to pull it down - but I'm not talking about people who are meddlesome. I'm not talking about Christians who are bitter and twisted, who have a chip on their shoulder for some reason. I'm talking about what we might call the cream of the spiritual society, I'm talking about people who really know their God, who have encountered and experienced God - and they are discontent, disillusioned with the church.

We've got to face that. There are many reasons for that, which I don't have time to talk to you about - but there is no doubt in my mind that one problem that there is, is that there is a famine in the land. There is a famine of the word of God. Now you might say to me: 'How is that possible?' - because, as we speak, though things might be on the decline in Northern Ireland, there are churches that are full. This church is packed to capacity, and there are a few others like it right across the land - how can you say that there is a famine in the preaching of the word? Well, I'm not talking about preaching the word, I'm talking about a famine of prophetic word - that's a different thing. You see ad nauseam I have heard quoted in evangelical prayer meetings Isaiah 55, where God says: 'My word shall not return unto Me void, but will accomplish that for which I have sent it' - how many times have you heard that? Now, if that verse is true the way people quote it, we ought to be in a constant perpetual revival - but we are not. We do so much sowing, and see very little reaping. But, you see, that verse is misquoted, it says: 'My word that goes forth out of My mouth, shall not return unto Me void' - that is the prophetic word, that is, if you like, the proceeding word of God, that comes from the heart and the mouth of God, to a specific people, in a particular situation, for a purpose.

Now that's different than just preaching the word of God. In fact, the Lord Jesus said: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth

of God' - not 'by every word of God', it doesn't say that. So our meat, our food and drink ought to be the prophetic word, listening for the word of God. Incidentally, Romans 10:17 also says: 'Faith comes by the word of God' - is that what it says? Faith does not come by the word of God, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. It is hearing the spoken word of God. Paul the apostle said: 'The kingdom of God is not word, but power' - that's what we need, and that is what is so desperately missing in a land where the Gospel and the word is preached continually.

But I sense that there is a group emerging - and when I say 'a group', I'm not talking about a recognisable established denomination or movement, I'm not talking about an organisation or anything of human design. I'm speaking about a group that has been birthed out of spiritual discontent and disillusionment, and being birthed out of a Holy Spirit desire and passion to encounter God. I believe that there are shoots of growth that indicate that God intends to revive His church in Ireland in particular. It's interesting that verse 6 reads: 'This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face'. It's an interesting statement: 'the generation of those who seek Your face'. Matthew Henry comments on it like this: 'In every age there is a remnant of such as these, men and women of character, who are accounted to the Lord for a generation'. Psalm 22:30: 'Accounted to the Lord for a generation', or as the NIV or the New Living Translation translates that, 'To ensure that future generations will be told about the Lord and His wonders'. A remnant of people, a generation of those who seek God's face, 'Who seek Thy face, O Jacob'.

I wonder are you one of those people? I had a retreat yesterday - probably too busy to have one, I should have had a day off! But I had a retreat with some elders of an evangelical church, quite a large church in Belfast, and they were looking some ministry on how to wait upon God. One of the elders very insightfully said to me that he had recently been reading a book entitled 'Why I Left the Church'. It wasn't by a backslider, it was actually by someone who really wanted to go on with God, but they couldn't find a church near them that wanted the same. Now don't misunderstand me: I'm not condoning people who leave the church. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and it's still the Bride of Christ. She may be in a very perilous position, and we need to pray, and work, and plead for the Bride of Christ - but let's not be blind to the state that she is in.

Yet there is a little remnant of people who are hungry after God within and without the church. These, look at verse 6, they join themselves to God like Jacob did - remember that Old Testament character? You remember he wrestled with God, and he prevailed. Jacob is a real encouragement to me, because he was not always so inclined. You know his story, in fact, if you know the definition of his name - Jacob means 'twister', 'conniver', 'supplanter', and 'thief'. There's a lot of those about in the church I'm sure, but isn't it wonderful to be encouraged to know that God actually took Jacob's name and said He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! This is the generation of those who seek God, they're like Jacob. Now listen: if Jacob can ascend the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place, anyone can, anyone can if they're prepared to climb God's way!

What is God's way? I heard a wonderful story a while ago about George Adam Smith, who was an Old Testament Biblical Scholar. He once climbed the Weisshorn above Zermatt Valley in Switzerland, if you've ever been you may have seen it. With his guide, he made the ascent on the sheltered side of the mountain. When at the top, he

was so exhilarated that he had reached it, and the thought that he had climbed it, and the panoramic view that was before him, the wonder of it - that he forgot where he was, and he forgot the gale that was blowing, and he threw his arms in the air and shouted with exhilaration. The guide just grabbed him and pulled him down to his knees, he said: 'On your knees! On your knees! You're only safe up here when you're on your knees!'. What a lesson he learned. To ascend the hill of the Lord is not a place for the foolhardy or for the shallow or the immature. It's not 'Climb, climb up sunshine mountain, heavenly breezes blow' - a whole lot of trash. It's not like that at all. To ascend the hill of the Lord is not a place for the proud, it's a place that is ascended on your knees.

A number of years ago I ask the Lord to - I was preparing for a message - to give me revival in a nutshell that I could deliver to the people. That's exactly what the Lord did, and He answered me through Isaiah 57 and verse 15, which reads, listen: 'For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him" - or her - "who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones". This was the message God give me, revival in a nutshell: reaching high can only be obtained by bending low. If you want to dwell with the High and Lofty God in Heaven who is the transcendent One above all, you must get as low as you can in contrite humility before Him.

There's a lot of activity and noise and fuss concerning revival. In all sorts of denominational circles and movements there are claims being made, and declarations pronounced, but there is little atmosphere of the heavenly mount. There is little evidence that we are ascending the hill of the Lord. Duncan Campbell, that great prophet of the God who was used mightily in the Hebridian revival, he was once in a prayer meeting with a lot of young people. They were good young people, and he was encouraging them and he was ministering to them, but he witnessed a great deal of exuberance among the young people. During the recess he was asked to join them for lunch and say a word of grace, and as he prayed he said: 'Lord, we could be doing with much more steam going to the pistons, and a lot less coming out of the whistle' - do you understand what he's getting at? It's not wrong, let the redeemed of the Lord say so - and we've been enjoying the praise, and some have been making declarations that have paved new life for you in Christ - but let us be aware, let's be sober and serious about this matter: if we truly want to know what a community is alive with the presence and life of God, we've got to realise the price that has to be paid.

That's perhaps why there aren't many at the mountain tops. Have you ever noticed that? When you climb a mountain, at the bottom there's a whole lot of people mingling with their rucksacks and all the rest, and their packed lunches - but when you get up to the summit, there are not too many people hanging about there. Some have fallen by the wayside, and the reason is: you've got to pay a price. You've got to pay a price to reach the hill of the Lord. I'm not presuming that I've reached that summit, but I feel I have little enough experience to know that it can be lonely, and it can be isolating to seek to go on with God in the days and the age in which we live - even in the church. You've got to be prepared for this. Even as a church here, as God moves in your midst - and I believe He is doing so in a mighty way - you've got to be prepared to be ostracised, to become a laughingstock, to be the pulpit fodder for those who would criticise you and preach against you. It will be lonely.

A.W. Tozer, that great man of God, said this, and I quote him: 'The loneliness of the Christian results from his walk with God in an ungodly world, a walk that must often take him away from the fellowship of good Christians, as well as from that of the unregenerate world. His God-given instincts cry out for companionship with others of his kind, others who can understand his longings, his aspirations, his absorption in the love of Christ; and because within his circle of friends there are so few who share his inner experiences he is forced to walk alone. The unsatisfied longings of the prophets for human understanding caused them to cry out in their complaint, and even our Lord Himself suffered in the same way. The man [or woman] who has passed on into the divine Presence in actual inner experience will not find many who understand him. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and over-serious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart. It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else'.

Who would ascend the hill of the Lord? Let me sum it up like this: revival comes when Christians are longing for God and God alone - and when you're prepared to have God and God alone. Now let me give a word of warning here: I've been ministering on the supernatural this week, and on the gifts of the Spirit and the fullness of the Spirit, and various blessings that we can receive - but I don't want you at all to misunderstand, it must be not the gifts but the Giver that we seek. It was that great man, Frederick Brooks, who said in his hymn:

'My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God'.

Wasn't it Gordon who said: 'Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord'. Duncan Campbell said: 'Revival is a community saturated with God'. Do you want God above all? Brian Edwards, in his great book on revival, says: 'When we are reading the serious, yet exciting, stories of God in revival, the only response possible is an awesome: 'God has come''. A people saturated with God! As Duncan Campbell said in that revival in the Hebrides: God was everywhere! A community encountering God.

So how can it come? Well, those in pursuit of God, who would ascend the hill of the Lord, have at least four characteristics about them that we see in verses 3-6 of Psalm 24. Four things: deeds, desires, devotion, and declarations all mark them out as people who are ascending the hill of the Lord. Let's look at them one by one, first of all: deeds. Verse 3: 'Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands' - your deeds have got to be right if you're going to encounter God. Collectively, if we as God's people are going to be saturated with His presence, and know an outpouring of His Spirit that can be sustained in new wineskins to flow out to the community around us, we've got to know that our deeds are right before God and men. Isn't that what Paul strove toward: to have a conscience void of offence before God and before men. Specifically, the psalmist says here: 'Clean hands' - he's alluding to our members. As Paul the apostle said: 'Make sure that your members', your bodily faculties, your limbs, your instruments, 'are instruments of righteousness unto God, rather than instruments of unrighteousness unto wickedness'.

So let me ask you tonight: is the Lord Jesus Christ Lord of your body? You see, we as Christians can fall into this trap of what was called in the early church 'dualism'. We spiritualize everything so that we almost despise the body and the physical - but, you know, God wants to be Lord of all, Lord of us: spirit, soul and body. That sealing of the Spirit that we receive when we are born again, deep down in our human spirit, that is the anointing of God where we are marked out, just like a farmer marks out his sheep or his animals. We are marked out, but God wants from that place, the human spirit, by His Spirit, to control the spirit, the soul, the mind, the emotions and the will - and then to fill the whole body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit!

Do I need to remind you what Paul said? 'You are not your own' - you are not your own! You're a child of God tonight, you're not your own, you're bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. God intends you to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are all living stones that He has put together, making a holy house, a holy habitation - and so that means: if you get Spirit-filled believers, individually before God, who are infused with Divine power, and then you bring them all together in a church context - wow! Does God inhabit His Temple suddenly! What are your deeds like? Clean hands?

What about your ears? Is the Lord, Lord of your ears, what you listen to, who you listen to? Some of you have been listening to the enemy, to his lies. Some of you listen to gossip and slander and so on, but many Christians are listening to the insinuations, the diabolical poisonous untruths of Satan - and we start to believe. We, as it were, sign a contract with him by mulling over it and analysing it, and dissecting this: 'Is this right? Is this right about me? Is this right about those around me?'. We're actually accepting his lies, and that means the Lord Jesus is not Lord of our ears.

What about our eyes? Is He Lord of everything that you look at? We live in a very visual age, and voyeurism is at epidemic proportions - particularly through Internet pornography, but the television can be as big a problem, in fact the daily red-top could be bigger. Is the Lord, Lord of your eyes, what you look at? What about the looks you give out, the looks that you give to other people? Your deeds. Is the Lord, Lord of your sexuality? Is He Lord of all its expressions? Is He Lord of your feet, every path that you tread? Is He Lord of your hands, everything that they do and everything that they touch? You see, we as Christians have a tendency to compartmentalize our lives, and we give only certain things to God when He wants it all - He wants it all! That's why Paul said in Romans 12 verses 1 and 2: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God', because of what Jesus has done for you, dying for you, being buried for you, rising again for you, 'that you present your bodies' - do you see what he saying? Bodies! I believe the inference was: if He's got your bodies, He has more than likely got your soul and your spirit! If He's got anybody's body, I would say He's got everything! 'Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service' - it's only expected of you, child of God - 'And do not be conformed to this world', as J.B. Phillips said, 'Do not let the world push you into its mould, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind', there's the soul now, 'that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'.

Do you want to ascend the hill of the Lord? Do you want revival in your heart, in your home, in your fellowship, in your community? Well, what about your deeds? Are your hands clean? Are mine? 'He that has clean hands' - deeds. The second thing the psalmist says here is that our desires need to be right. 'He that has clean hands', verse

4, 'and a pure heart'. I believe that's more likely speaking of motives, what are our motives like? Now you have to be careful - and I've spoken in the week that has gone by about the disease of introspection. If you're one of these perfectionist people, (who can be failures, and if you can't get it perfect then you bail out and you just do nothing - if you can't do it, you'll not do it at all). Or you can be at the top end of the scale, a high achiever doing well, and you're devastated when you don't achieve perfection - which no one ever does - and so you have this constant syndrome of putting yourself on your own dissection table, and analysing and cutting yourself up, and not being affirmed.

I'm not talking about that, analysing your motives all the time, but what I am talking about is repenting, and admitting your pride, as we said on Tuesday night - and just asking God in your brokenness and surrender to fill the empty spaces in you with the graces that you need. So, if your motives are wrong, and you are self-seeking and self-centred, well, confess it! That's the way to get rid of it - not deny it, not wrestle with it, but become present to the issues and say: 'Lord, this is my problem, and You know it, and I know it, and I'm telling You' - and by confessing it you actually bring it up and out of you, did you know that? You bring it up and out of you, and you create a space where God can fill that emptiness with His grace, whatever that is.

A pure heart - well, a lot of the heart is synonymous with the thoughts in the Bible. Let me ask you: does the Lord have your mind? He wants all of you, does He have your mind? Does He have your thoughts? Does the Lord have your understanding, and is He Lord of your imagination? Is He Lord of your will? That comes into motivation as well. Is He Lord of your intentions and all your decisions? Is He Lord of your emotions that often drive you to those, and Lord of your feelings? We're touching now on the area of the soul, for the soul is tripartite - made up of mind, emotion, and will, volition. So He needs to be Lord of the body, and He needs to be Lord of the soul - is He Lord of your soul?

You want to ascend the hill of the Lord? You want to stand in His holy place? Well, you need to have given Him your deeds and given Him your desires. Thirdly: you need to give Him devotion. Look at verse 4 again, the second half: 'Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol'. Now, the good old Authorised Version which we love, says: 'Who has not lifted up his heart to vanity' - but that really doesn't mean anything now today. A lot of people confound that, and think that's somebody admiring their hair-do in the mirror - that's not what it's talking about. 'Vanity' there, that old English phrase, is actually referring to an idol: 'Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol'.

Now, this is the realm of the spirit. We've covered the body, and the Lord wants to be in control of the body. He wants to have your soul: your mind, your emotion, and your will. But now this is the realm of the spirit, and the spirit is that part of us that is human, but God breathed it into us - that connecting part with God. You see the body is the part of us that engages with the physical, it is physical and it encounters the outside environment, and the senses are the things that we do that with. The soul well, it's mind, emotion, and will, as I said - it's the self-conscious part of us, the seat of the personality we might say. But the spirit is actually our identity as spiritual beings, it is the real you - but it is the God-conscious part. You see, we as human beings are like an interface between the physical and the spiritual realm - do you understand what I'm saying now? The angels and demons are spiritual, they are celestial beings; the beasts of the field are physical; but we are both physical and spiritual - we are an interface, a

connecting place of both dimensions.

So I'm asking you really tonight: what is your spirit bent over towards? What is it worshipping? 'Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol' - that's worship, the spirit bent towards something. This is just what Jesus said, do you remember? He said: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'. Your treasure is just what you're bowing down to. Now we can think of people who may be millionaires, or who are celebrity and famous, and they might bow down to that - but we as Christians can bow down to our family. We can have, as I said on previous nights, a disordered love. We ought to love our family, but Jesus clearly said that we're not to love them more than Him - that's a struggle for us all, but we at least need to be, by the help of the Spirit, striving toward that, because we can have a bent, disordered love that becomes idolatrous - even with a husband, or a wife, or a parent, or a child, or with a career, or even with a ministry or a church. The Lord says specifically here: 'If you want to climb My hill, if you want to stand in My Holy Presence, you need to rid yourself of all idolatry, all heart ties, anything that your spirit is bending down towards, taking My place'.

This can often be indicated by what we invest in. I'm not talking about financially - although that can tell us a great deal: what are you spending your money on more than anything? What are you spending your time in? What are you expending your energies on? That really is a sign of what you devote yourself to - that's what we're talking about: devotion is an indication of those who are ascending the hill of the Lord and those who are not. What are you investing your life in? Those who are climbing God's Mount, their deeds show that their hands are clean, their desires are coming from a pure heart - God has their body, God has their soul - and their spirit is not lifted up, bowing down to vain idols, but God owns them: spirit, soul and body.

There is one final thing here: deeds, desires, devotion - and declarations. Declarations. It was the Lord Jesus who said: 'Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks'. Now look at verse 4 at the end, the one who ascends the hill of the Lord does not swear deceitfully: 'He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation' - the one who does not swear deceitfully. Your declarations have got to be right, for out of the mouth the heart speaks. As someone put it once: the mouth, or words, project personality. It's worthy of thinking about.

So, are you honest with your words? Are you trustworthy with your promises? Do you have integrity in your conversation? Turn with me back to Psalm 15, we see the same sentiment. Psalm 15, declarations - it's on the very same theme too. Verse 1: 'LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?', that's His dwellingplace, 'Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness', that's deeds, 'and speaks the truth in his heart', that's declaration, 'He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change' - even when it's not in your interests - 'He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved'.

There's an interesting paraphrase of that Psalm that goes like this, it's a bit strange you might say, but I think it gets to the point. Listen: 'God, who gets invited to dinner at your place? How do we get on your guest list? 'Walk straight'', God says, 'act right,

tell the truth. Don't hurt your friend, don't blame your neighbour; despise the despicable. Keep your word even when it costs you, make an honest living, never take a bribe. You'll never get blacklisted if you live like this" - isn't that good? If you want to be invited to God's table - I love that story, Moses, do you remember he was invited up to the holy Mount, do you remember? The seventy elders, and they were taken up, and it says: 'They saw the God of Israel'. They sat down, and it says they dined with Him.

What are your declarations? Or, to put it another way: is He Lord of your mouth? Is he Lord of your mouth? I said on Friday night that some people want the supernatural gift of tongues, but they won't allow the Holy Spirit to control their natural tongue. Is He Lord of everything that comes out of your mouth? Is He Lord of everything that goes into your mouth, for that matter? James says that the child of God can exhibit this phenomenon: that out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. So that can happen from a believer - and, wait till I tell you: it's happening all the time. In church contexts, history of grievances and business meetings, where pure vitriol and bile has been expulsed at one another, there has been cursing from the mouths of the children of God - and I believe it brings cursing upon God's community. I don't believe that when you say things, 'Oh, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me', I don't believe that. I believe there is power in words, spiritual power in words.

Now we don't want to become obsessive about it, but I believe that many things that are said have to be broken, have to be broken and renounced. In fact, the Galatians had a great problem with legalism in the flesh. We looked at the fruit of the Spirit on Friday night, but we didn't look at the works of the flesh that were exhibiting themselves in their midst. One of the fruits of legalism - that is, trying to live the Christian life in the power of an energy of humanity, rather than the Spirit - is that you exhibit the works of the flesh. That's what Paul said in Romans, that the law actually multiplies sin, it amplifies sin, it encourages you to sin. It's like telling a child: 'Don't steal out of the cookie jar' - and what do they want to do? They want to steal out of the cookie jar.

The Galatians exhibited this fleshliness. Paul said: 'You bite and devour one another'. It came through their mouth. You remember at Pentecost, they spoke in tongues in the great praises of God? In Ephesians 5:18, it says: 'You are filled with the Spirit, you will speak to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs' - it affects your mouth! What is it that is coming out of your mouth? Is He Lord of your mouth?

Who will ascend the hill of the Lord? Those with deeds right before God, clean hands; desires right before God, a pure heart; devotion before God, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol; declarations that are right before God, that even swears to his own hurt. This is holiness - and you know I'm not talking now about some legalistic or old-fashioned holiness. I'm talking about real, Holy Spirit engendered holiness that comes from God - but it is exhibited in who we are: in what we do with our bodies; what we think, and feel, and act with our souls; what we worship with our spirit.

Brian Edwards said: 'God looks for men and women who will be willing to surrender anything and everything, so long as their life can be kept clean. Without exception, those whom God uses in revival are men and women who fear God and sin, and nothing else'. Fear God, and sin, and nothing else! He says: 'They take seriously the

command 'Be holy, for I am holy, says the Lord'. Is that not just the record of the Bible, but history? John Wesley declared, listen, 1734: 'My one aim in life is to secure personal holiness, for without being holy myself, I cannot promote real holiness in others'. Can I let you into a wee open secret? That was four years before he was converted. Four years before he was saved, he saw the need for holiness! He got it the wrong way round, I know - but later, when he did come to Christ, he said: 'Give me one hundred men that fear nothing but sin, and the devil, and God, and I'll turn the world upside down'.

It's still the same today: who will ascend the hill of the Lord? Who will stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; that does not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor swear deceitfully. David Brainerd recalls a time when, among the Indians in North America, one night before a pagan festival he went to the woods to be alone with God, and his experience during that night reveals the kind of men and women God can trust with revival. I quote him: 'All things here below vanished; and there appeared to be nothing of any considerable importance to me but holiness of heart and life and the conversion of the heathen to God. All my cares, fears and desires, which might be said to be of a worldly nature, disappeared; and were, in my esteem, of little more importance than a puff of wind. I exceedingly longed that God would 'get to Himself a name among the heathen': And I appealed to Him with the greatest freedom, that He knew I 'preferred Him above my chief joy'.

Oh, can you say that tonight? That the things of this world vanish, and you prefer Him above your chief joy? Duncan Campbell, who I have mentioned several times already, describes his own experience of surrendering completely to Christ. He was shot from off his horse, and seriously wounded in one of the last cavalry charges of the Great World War, World War I. Whilst a Canadian trooper was carrying him on horseback to the casualty clearing station, Campbell reviewed his life. He saw how empty it had been, even as a Christian. It was there, not knowing whether he would live or die, he prayed Murray M'Cheyne's prayer: 'Lord, make me as holy as a saved sinner can be'. Who in the meeting tonight will pray that prayer? 'Lord, make me as holy as a saved sinner can be'. Vance Havner rightly said that most church members live so far below the standard, you'd have to backslide to be in fellowship with them: 'We are so subnormal, that if we were to become normal, people would think that we were abnormal'. We are so subnormal, Christians, that if we were to become normal, according to the Acts of the Apostles and the early prophets and evangelists, we would be seen as abnormal - that's the way they were seen! They were seen as madmen, they were seen as drunken, and yet they turned the world upside down!

Do you want to ascend the hill of the Lord? Who here tonight wants to ascend the hill of the Lord? Who wants to stand in His holy place? There is a cost. Your deeds have to be surrendered; your desires must be right, and holy, and pure - if they're not, they can be, but you must surrender them to the Lord. Your devotion must be absolute, no idolatry; and your declarations, your words must be weighed and not found wanting, full of grace and seasoned, salted with truth.

A group praying with the Reverend McKay, at 10:00pm, around then, in a barn in Barvas about 12 miles away from Stornoway in the Hebrides - while leaning on the straw, they pleaded with Almighty God that He would open the windows of Heaven and pour out revival blessing. There was a young deacon from the Free Church of Scotland who stood up, and he read this very Psalm, Psalm 24: 'Who may ascend into the hill of

the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol, nor swear falsely'. He read the passage again, and he read it again, and then he challenged the praying group - and this is what he said: 'Brethren, we have been praying for weeks, waiting on God - but I would like to ask now: are your hands clean? Are your hearts pure?'. He inferred that they were wasting their time if this was not in place. As they continued to wait before God, Duncan Campbell says: 'His awesome presence swept the barn, and at 4:00am they' - and this is his own words - 'moved out of the realm of the common and the natural sphere, into the sphere of the supernatural' - and that is revival!

Let us pray. D.L. Moody (or at least it was attributed to him) said: 'The world is yet to see what God can do with a man', or a woman for that matter, 'fully consecrated to Him'. D.L. Moody said: 'By God's help, I aim to be that man'. Can you say that tonight? There are some young people here, some children even, will you say tonight: 'God will have my life. He'll not just have my Sundays and my Saturday nights, or my midweeks, or my youth clubs. He'll not just have my teenage years in the University Christian Union, or in the school lunchtime Bible studies and prayer meetings. He'll not just have my team ministry here and there before I marry and settle down'. I'm not talking now just about service, I'm talking about the heart: 'He will have my all'. It's not you can't serve Him in your job where you are - you can, but do you serve Him where you are in your job? Does He have your all? Does He have your heart? Does He have your very body?

I know this church, some of them anyway, the core of them, want to ascend the hill of the Lord. I believe you're getting there - but there's more, so much more. It might take - do you know what it might take? It might take some of you who have issues with each other, to get up and go over the aisle, and to put it right. 'Oh', you say, 'I've put it right in my heart' - God does desire truth in the inward place, but He desires putting things right. Faith without works is dead. If your brother has aught against you, and you know it, leave your gift at the altar and go - don't even worship - go and sort it out! That's what we need! That's what we need! The wrong needs to be put right, wrong deeds, wrong motives. Maybe God is laying something on your heart now, about your hands, your heart, your devotion, and your words. I want to ask you tonight, those of you individually and maybe as a group who want to ascend the hill of the Lord, and are cognisant of the cost, what this means - you're not living in cloud cuckoo land, you're not one of these spiritual lusting people who just want an experience - you know what we're talking about. You want to go through with God for what He has for you, and you're willing tonight - I'm not looking for numbers - you're willing tonight to surrender all, spirit, soul and body: would you stand to your feet? Just stand where you are. Eyes are closed and heads are bowed, it's between you and God. We'll wait a moment or two for anyone else.

God has been doing mighty things, meeting people - don't miss out tonight. If God has spoken to you, sort the issue out. I want to lead you all in a prayer, those standing and those still remaining seated. You might not be standing, but you still want to deal with God. It's quite a lengthy prayer, but it's a very meaningful prayer - it's what I call 'the Lordship prayer', and you can repeat it after me. I would encourage you please to take it on your lips. You don't have to let the person beside you hear, but if you mouth it on your lips - I think it's important for confession. So just repeat it after me if you're wanting to surrender all to the Lord: 'Lord Jesus, I acknowledge my need of You. I accept You now afresh as my Lord, and acknowledge You as my Saviour, my

Redeemer, and my Deliverer. I invite You now to be Lord of every area of my life. Be Lord of my spirit, of my worship, my conscience, and my spiritual understanding. Be Lord of my mind, of my thoughts, my understanding and my imagination. Be Lord of my will, of my intentions, and of all my decisions. Be Lord of my emotions, and all my feelings. Be Lord of my body, and of my physical health, all my actions and all my senses: of my ears, and everything that I listen to; of my eyes, and everything that I look at, and of every look that I give out; of my mouth, and everything that goes into it, and every word that comes out of it. Be Lord of my sexuality and all its expressions. Be Lord of my hands, and everything that they do and touch. Be Lord of my feet, and of every path that I tread. Be Lord of my finances, and my material goods. Be Lord of my time, of my work, my free time, my sleep and my dreams. Be Lord of my relationships, of my family, of my marriage, my church fellowship, my friendships. Be Lord of my plans, my ambitions, and my future. Be Lord of the timing of my death. Lord Jesus, I thank You that Your blood was shed so that I might be free and I might be cleansed. I commit, or I recommit, myself to You: spirit, soul, and body. To Your glory, Amen'.

You may be seated. Now, God has been near again tonight, and you don't need me or the pastor or any human being - you need the Lord. But if you should desire some counsel or prayer, we're here. The prayer rooms are to my right and left, and in the foyer there's a door to the major prayer room, and we can meet you in other places if there is a great number of people. We invite folk to stay in the presence of God tonight, so we would ask you please to observe the quietness and stillness, as the presence of God is so evident amongst us. Please know that people are dealing with God, and do not disturb them. I would ask you: do not chatter, there will be no music after we sing our hymn. If you want to talk, feel free to talk out in the foyer or the car park, but please don't talk here. Do feel at liberty and at your leisure to hang on seeking God.

'Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence; as fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil; to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence! When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down, the mountains shook at Your presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him'. Lord, we wait for You, we look to You, for the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, we thank You. We give You all the praise and all the glory for what You have deposited in our lives this week, but Lord, we know there is so much more! You are the God who does exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think, and so we say: even so, come Lord Jesus! Come suddenly into Your Temple, pour water upon him that is thirsty, and the floods upon the dry ground. Oh, let it come, O Lord, we pray Thee, and we will give You all the praise and all the glory. Bless us now as we go in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit - and remain with those who stay, and those who are ministered to and prayed with, and those who must go. But may none of us go without going with God, and going through with God. We thank You, Lord, for this Divine encounter this week. Amen.

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