

Going Fishing



David Wilkerson September 1, 1983

I want to speak with you about a unique experience that is shared primarily by those who yearn to go deeper in Christ. It has to do with a tremendous spiritual letdown that usually follows periods of fresh anointing and divine revelation. Only those men and women of God who have had a unique touch from Him can understand the deadlock and dark plunges that follow spiritual highs.

It is the testimony of spiritual giants in all ages, that the most severe temptations, the most oppressive battles — follow soon after the greatest spiritual experiences.

Paul's thorn in the flesh came after his greatest revelation — soon after he had ascended into the third heaven and witnessed things too awesome to describe.

Daniel set himself to pray, and in a spirit of intercession he was given wisdom and revelation. Freshly anointed with the Spirit of Almighty God, he was cast into a lion's.

The three Hebrew Children entered into a pact to live holy, separated lives. They became spiritually and physically wise and enlightened beyond all their peers. It got them a fiery furnace. Their spiritual hunger resulted in revelation, which in turn brought on an even deeper spiritual test.

Christ Himself could not escape the inevitable test that follows great anointing. He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil immediately after the Spirit descended upon Him as He came out of baptismal waters. He went directly from revelation to temptation.

A Personal Experience

I have just recently come through a nearly indescribable experience. It started about 6 weeks ago at a convention in Dallas, Texas. At the conclusion of my message concerning the sufferings of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord came upon me in a mighty way, literally taking possession of my entire being and through my lips began to exalt the Lord Jesus. Only three words were spoken — "Glory, Honor, and Praise." Over and over, higher and higher, the words poured forth like a rushing river.

I was suddenly swept away in that river of praise, and I felt my spiritual man leaving the auditorium. My praises were now joined to those of angels, of heavenly hosts around the throne. Hundreds sat in silence as I collapsed in the pulpit. Although my physical body lay prostrate in that auditorium, my spiritual man was no longer on this earth. I was with the worshipping hosts near God's throne. What freedom I felt to praise. What marvelous light — so warm and comforting.

I thought, "This must be what saints of all ages have seen of the heavenlies." In the spirit, I was rejoicing, falling down before him crying out, "Glory, honor, and praise. Worthy is the Lamb."

I cannot describe that experience fully. I do know I will never be the same. In His presence there was no thought of seeing Moses, or Abraham, or any of the patriarch, not even Paul. There was no desire to seek out family or friends. I saw clearly why there would be no marrying. I saw how unimportant the question is, "Will we know each

other in heaven?"

None of these things mattered. There was no concern for streets of gold, or mansions, or even reward. Christ was everything — all-consuming, all fulfilling, all-satisfying. There was no room for no more. No earthly memories. No human attractions. In His presence there is fullness of joy, at His right hand there are pleasures evermore. It was the revelation of Christ in eternal glory that was so overpowering. Truly, in Him is the fullness of the Godhead.

I knew at that moment that the joy and ecstasy of heaven is not static or level. The joys, the revelation of who Christ is will be ever unfolding, all through eternity. We will have an ever-expanding capacity to enjoy His glory throughout eternity — with newer and greater joys and revelations. We will grow in the knowledge of Him, and that revelation will give us an ever-growing sense of joy and peace. There is a peace that truly passeth all understanding.

I did not want to leave that glorious scene. My praises had become one with the eternal voices of worship — while multitudes worshipped, it seemed as but one grand and glorious voice. It was awesome! I began to realize how little we know of the glory of praise, and how our praises blend with the praises of all saints of all ages — into one glorious, eternal chorus.

And what glorious light! It permeated everything! Christ radiated, not rays of light, but diffused light that brought life, comfort, joy, and a sense of nearness to Himself.

I knew that what I was experiencing was not a result of any personal holiness or spiritual goodness on my part. It was simply God answering my desperate hunger and my inner cry to know Him better — that alone was allowing me to taste just a little bit of His glory.

When I awakened and sat up, my wife was relieved. People thought for a moment I may have had a heart attack. But she was at ease when she saw the glory of the Lord on my face. The afterglow was so powerful, it was a long time before we spoke a word to each other.

That night I thought I could never again go down into a valley of despair. Hadn't I seen a glimpse of His glory? Was it not the greatest single revelation in my lifetime? Had I not set my heart to abandon all fleshly ways, to go all the way with God? Certainly some would think such an experience is emotional, too charismatic, or even unscriptural. But no one can take from me what I experienced — it was too sacred and awesome.

It was less than a week later that I entered into the driest six weeks of my life. I seemed to go from the heavenlies, to agonizing emptiness. Not that I once doubted His love for me. On the contrary, I loved Him more than ever. My salvation was never in question.

I had thought tremendous growth would soon follow. I would increase in spiritual revelation by leaps and bounds. My hunger for Him would be answered by ever-increasing divine wisdom and biblical revelation. The Scriptures would open more easily. Prayer would be more glorious. Instead, the heavens seemed to shut on me. My prayer life became stifled, and a spiritual dryness crept in. I felt like I was stymied, as though I was losing spiritual ground. One brother explained to me that my present letdown was God's way of getting me down to earth, and to avoid all such further emotional experiences. But in my heart I knew his remarks came out of his own spiritual deadness. He was letter perfect, spirit bankrupt.

Certainly God was not in hiding, for He has promised to never leave or forsake us. Yet He seemed to have stopped the flow of spiritual energy. But deep within me I could sense a purpose in the trial. I knew I was experiencing a trial common to many others.

T. Austin-Sparks was a pious English minister who had received tremendous revelations concerning the indwelling of Christ. He is one of my favorite authors.

A dear lady wrote to me this week, telling how she first discovered his writings. It touched her so deeply, she sold all of her possessions and went to London to sit under his teaching. She personally heard him confess to his students that every new revelation he received of Christ's glory was followed by satanic attacks on his physical body. He would experience terrible gastritis and stomach pains, sleepless nights, and extreme loneliness. Few of his students knew the price he paid for such deep revelation.

In one of his writings entitled HIS GREAT LOVE, Brother Sparks shared some of his insights on the subject. He wrote:

"We have a lot to say about the fullness of Christ, of the church which is His body, and of identification with Christ. All these are great truths, great conceptions. But what I find is this, that we have not come to an end of God's thoughts yet. I am very glad of this; but it is the most painful thing we can know, that we will never come to an end here, and in order to go on into a further stage something has to happen to us, get down to the bottom and clean out of all that has gone before us. We go through a new experience of death and desolation and emptiness, of hopelessness, in order to come to something further on in the divine revelation.

"We thought, 'Now, we have come into the fullness of God's thought. Now at length we are seeing what God is after. We are expanding.' We get on with that for a time and it fills our whole vision; and then everything is as though it were nothing, and we go through a terrible time. Oh, yes, it was right, it was true, but it was not God's whole end.

"My experience is that it is through just such a history with God, of repeated desolation and emptyings and sparings after wonderful unveilings and times when you feel there cannot be anything more, that you are brought up again into something further on, with your vision enlarged."

Peter Went Fishing

The greatest revelation the disciples would ever receive focused on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the first day of the week, and the disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Suddenly, there He was, in full resurrection glory — victorious over death, hell, and the devil. He showed them His hands, His feet, His pierced side. Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

What glorious truths were coming forth. Revelation upon revelation. A new anointing, a new commission to go forth in His name, power to bind and loose, victory over the power of sin.

It was too much for the disciples — especially Thomas. He reacted with passive despair. Peter said, "I go a fishing." Other disciples went with him.

It was as if Peter wanted nothing more to do with the high cost of revelation. Had he not failed one test already? From that proud boast that he would never forsake his Lord, to despair of denial. Peter could not take it all in. I think I know nearly exactly what he said to himself as he headed back to his fishing nets — "I'll never make it, I'm too dull to understand the way God works. I can't comprehend the cross, and how will I ever understand His resurrection? I'm making no spiritual progress — after all this time I've spent with Him, I have understood so little. Let those who are brighter than me go on with Him. I'll always love Him, but no more delving into the deep thoughts of Christ. I just want to do my own thing, in my own quiet way."

In one way or another most of us react to spiritual letdowns in the same manner of speaking. In our frustration we mope about, getting lazy about spirituals — neither hot nor cold. We move into spiritual vacuum. We end up wanting to pray, yet with no motivation to do it. We are pricked in our conscience because of our neglect of His Word, but the desire to dig in has gone. It is a fretful condition to be in.

We know the Lord has called us to go on in Him, to go deeper — but because we do not understand our despair, we fall back into our old ways. We get stagnant. Worst of all, we begin to feel guilty for our lethargy. Our fears mount that we will never measure up to what God wants for us. So we will go back to busyness — some to shopping sprees, others to their hobbies. Some seek release in building something or starting a new project. The time once spent with God in growing, is wasted on some form of "fishing" — and in an ever-increasing bondage to details. We become frivolous and indecisive.

How many times I've told the Lord and myself — "I'll never understand the things of God like I should. The more I read, the less I seem to comprehend. I am so dull, so spiritually blind, I can't seem to retain what I read and hear. The hungrier I get, the less I seem to grow. I seem to take two steps back for every step forward. Why is it that other men of God get such clear revelations and they know so much about Christ — and I struggle, fast, pray, and see so little. Lord, am I making any progress at all?"

Brother Sparks has an encouraging word along these lines. He wrote:

"We may adopt different courses in our perplexities, in adversity, under trial. When the Lord hides Himself and we cannot see Him, or hear Him, and we do not feel that He is with us, He seems to be so far away and to have gone right out of our world. All we were expecting seems to have come to an end, and we do not know where we are, then we are prone to go some way that we choose for ourselves, and begin to take alternatives to steadfast love.

"It is a positive challenge, because these are experiences, these are tests, that the Lord allows. It is not a wrong thing to say that there are times when the Lord hides Himself, when the Lord lets us feel that we are left alone, when the Lord seems to close the heavens to us so that there is no to-and-fro communication. Everything that we had looked for, expected and preached, seems to have come to an end and to have broken down, and we are just left in what seems like the ruins of everything.

"The Lord just does do that, and particularly does He do that sort of thing when He has people in view who are going to count. People who are going to count for Him go through deep experiences like that, and the object is to get them onto a basis which will make it possible for Him to use them. We will never be used unless we can stand on our own feet in the storm. We are useless to the Lord if we go to pieces when everything around us, and in our spiritual life, seems to have come to a deadlock. If then we give it up, we are of no use to the Lord. The whole question of future usefulness to the Lord is based on upon a love for the Lord which does not give up and say, 'I go a fishing.' 'I take an alternative to following the Lord, I take an alternative to going on with the Lord because of this situation.'

"This is why the Lord came back, once, twice — 'Follow Me,' 'Follow thou Me.' 'You went back under trial, under testing — now follow thou Me.' And you have got to follow and go on following when you cannot see Him, when you do not know where He is, you have got to go on. These are the kind of people, and these alone, who will be used as Peter was. The basis of everything was that kind of personal love to the Lord Himself, not for what He was doing for Peter at the time, but for Himself. Oh, that is difficult — God only knows how difficult it is — to love Him for Himself when He does not seem to be doing any thing for us at all. That is the challenge of love."

Conclusion

Peter did go fishing, and at the Lord's command he cast his net on the opposite side and gathered a tremendous harvest of fish. Later, while Peter separated his catch, Jesus said to him, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" In other words, "Peter, if you love Me, get back to where you were. Follow ME — Feed My Sheep. Stop doing your own thing — wake up! If you love Me — that love will turn you around and get you back on the road of growth and usefulness."

Are you going through a most difficult right now? Are you spinning your spiritual wheels, in the doldrums of dryness? Are you finding it hard to even understand or explain what you are going through? I have one question for you: do you really love Him? That is all He asks of you, a love that obeys. You are experiencing growth pains. It's all a part of becoming mature in Christ. God has His hand on you more than ever. Satan knows it, and is trying everything within his power to sidetrack you with lies and distortions. Move on in blind faith until the joy returns — and it will. Ride out your storm, and don't worry about measuring up. You will come through on the other side realizing how much you have grown. Don't ever again let your own deadlocks or dry spells bring you to despair. Rejoice in them — they are part of God's plan to bring us into His purpose and thoughts.

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