



Psalms 78:2-4

I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old... We will not conceal them.

Parables Bookshelf - Series 1.7.2

This issue of PARABLES BOOKSHELF contains chapters 4-6 of the book *Evidence of Things Unseen*.

In the previous newsletter I spoke of seeing the presence of God in our lives. When we begin to understand God's intimate presence in all His creation we begin to discern His hand in many things.

Everything Yahweh has made in creation has been fashioned with great purpose and intricate design. Yahweh is the originator of mathematics, and significant numbers are seen throughout the creation.

Some years ago the Spirit of Christ opened

my eyes to see how God has used numbers throughout the Scriptures and in all creation to reveal truth and to testify of His presence.

The numbers 1,3, and 7 are expressions of His own nature. Naturally we find these numbers throughout Scriptures and creation in ways that testify truths of His presence.

The Bible tells us that God is ONE God.

Deuteronomy 6:4

"Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is ONE!"

We also read that Yahweh is a Triune God, consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are

also told that God has seven spirits.

Revelation 4:5

And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God...

In the next issues of this newsletter I will share some examples of the numbers 1,3, and 7 in the Scriptures and creation, showing how they testify remarkable things about the Creator.

Seeing God's presence in the mathematical design of the creation is simply one way that those who are aware of His presence are able to discern His hand in all things.

Food for Thought

"The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world."

Charles Dickens

"All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more strongly the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures."

Sir William Herschel

Scripture Memory

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

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Evidence of Things Unseen

Prophetic Utterances

Isaiah 42:18-20

Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace with Me, or so blind as the servant of Yahweh? You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; your ears are open, but none hears.

I think perhaps the saddest person in the world is the one who does not discern the presence of God in his or her life. To think that God would

To think that God would create us and then leave us to ourselves is a tragic thought.

create us and then leave us to ourselves is a tragic thought. How hurtful it would be to think that God cared so little for His creation that He would simply

choose to ignore what He has created and take a hands off approach to our lives. Such a mindset is not supported by the testimony of Scripture.

Luke 12:6-7

“Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”

Jonah 4:10-11

Then Yahweh said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

God does have compassion upon the works of His hands. He cares for men and women, as well as cattle and birds. Yahshua's words concerning the sparrows make a great study. He said of the sparrows "Not one of them is forgotten before God." Do you know how many sparrows are in the world? The word sparrow originally meant "any small bird". There must be billions of small birds in the world, and God has not forgotten a single one. Why then would anyone imagine that God's eye is not upon the people he has created, who are of much greater value in God's sight?

I remember an occasion years ago when I had my first encounter with someone who had the gift of prophecy. I was at the same Southern Baptist church where I first heard the message of grace. The exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, including words of prophecy, were rare among this body. One Sunday a man named Jeff Burke was invited to come and share with the congregation about the gift of prophecy. There was nothing extraordinary about this man's appearance. In fact, he and I could have passed for brothers. Yet as he began to share his testimony it was evident that his experience was vastly different from most of the Christians I had grown up around. Jeff spoke of hearing God's voice, and sharing the things God spoke to him with others. He gave example after example, and I was amazed as I heard of the precision with which God had spoken to people through him.

We had been told that there would be a time at the end of the service where Jeff would ask the Lord if He had a word to be shared with any of the members of the congregation. As I sat listening an intense yearning grew in my heart to hear a word of prophecy from God. I did not care if God exposed my sin publicly, which is what I expected Him to do, I just wanted to hear God speak to me. I wanted to know that God was attentive to me, and that He cared enough about me to say something to me, even if it was

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a word of judgment. As I sat there awaiting the time of ministry I prayed silently that God would not pass me by, but that He would give this man a word for me.

After Jeff finished sharing his testimonies, and teaching about the gift of prophecy, he said that God had given him some things to share with a number of individuals. You cannot imagine how excited I was when the first person he walked up to was me. He came and stood beside me and said, “You have seen yourself as a marshmallow, but God says you have steel in your backbone. God would also say to you, ‘I have seen your obedience, and I will make it known.’”

There was no doubt in my mind that I had just received a message from God. I believe I was in my early thirties at the time of this word, and I truly did see myself as a marshmallow. As an outward manifestation of this, I was overweight and my wife and kids were in the habit of poking me in the belly so that I would laugh at them like the Pillsbury Dough Boy that is pictured in commercials. Just a short time before this I had a birthday and my wife and kids bought me some suspenders and a necktie that had pictures of the Pillsbury Dough Boy on them. The Pillsbury Dough Boy looks like he has been constructed of marshmallows, and this physical picture described how I felt about myself spiritually.

When this word was shared with me it went straight to my heart. As cute as I thought these little dough boys were, when I got home later I threw out both the suspenders and the tie (with my wife’s and kids’ understanding), for I was convicted that I could not continue to wear something that portrayed an image God said was not true. God said I was not a marshmallow, but that I had steel in my backbone, and I chose to believe Him despite what my experiences in the past had told me.

It was not long afterward that I was able to put this prophetic word to the test. The Lord led me to fast for several days, and this particular fast was very difficult. I had headaches and hunger pangs, and the temptation to eat was very great. I was taking college classes at this time and I remember driving back home from college one night and I was passing many fast food restaurants. Satan was tempting me earnestly to break my fast, and the warfare within between the spirit and the flesh was intense. As I drove down the road I began shouting out, “Satan, you are a liar. You say I cannot do this, but God says I have steel in my backbone and I choose to believe God. I will not give into the flesh, but I will walk by the Spirit.” I also prayed to God confessing as truth the things He had spoken to me. I had a real good shouting time as I drove home, and the battle was won. I completed the days of this fast as God had directed me to do.

The second part of this prophetic word was equally surprising to me. I had really been expecting God to expose some sin in my life, and I had numerous weaknesses that he could have focused upon. I thought God would mention my faults and tell me to repent, and I would have considered myself blessed to receive such a word. I would have thought, “Yes, God noticed me. He has seen me and spoken a word to me.” Even if it had been a word of correction I would have been pleased that I had not been passed by.

I had really been expecting God to expose some sin in my life...

Yet God did not say, “I have seen your **disobedience**,” He said, “I have seen your **obedience**, and I will make it known.” The effect upon me was greater than if He had exposed my sins, for I saw such a graciousness in God, knowing that He could have truly pointed out many errors in my life, but He chose to speak of

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my obedience instead. The effect was that I wanted to please this loving and gracious God. I wanted to rule over my flesh and walk in a manner worthy of Him.

Saints, there is such joy in knowing that God is attentive to us. It really matters not whether He is pouring blessings out upon us, or whether He

There is joy in knowing that God is attentive to us.

is disciplining us as sons; whether he is giving us a positive and encouraging word of prophecy, or whether he is speaking a word of correction. The joy is in

knowing His presence, His concern, His watchfulness over our lives. This is why I have said that the saddest person in the world is the one who does not discern God's presence with them.

I have not forgotten this first word of prophecy that I received. It has been more than ten years since that date, and the words have been brought to my remembrance time and again when I needed to hear them. I have been emboldened to stand firm in times of trial, and I have been comforted through the many times when my obedience has been characterized as something evil. I know that one day God will vindicate all those who have suffered reproaches and false characterizations at the hands of those who call good evil, and evil good.

There are many Christians today who have been taught that prophetic words are not for today. They have received the lie that all such gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased to exist when the first apostles died, or around the time the Bible was officially canonized. By receiving such falsehoods they rob themselves of another way in which God makes His presence known in our lives. The apostle Paul wrote:

I Thessalonians 5:19-21

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good...

I have no doubt that there are false prophets and false prophetic words being uttered today in abundance. I have heard many such words with my own ears. There is, however, a true gift of prophecy that is not to be despised. I have not run after those who are acclaimed to have such gifts, but have allowed the Lord to bring them to me when He desired. When God has brought these prophetic words to me they have had a ring of authority, authenticity and truth. In the following chapters of this book I will relate some of the other profound words that have been spoken through the men, women, and children that God has placed His Spirit upon in these last days.

Joel 2:28-29

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

A Fool Returns to His Folly

Proverbs 26:11

Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who returns to his folly.

I mentioned previously that I had disobeyed God in the area of financial stewardship, and, when I cried out for deliverance from the burden of debt I had gotten myself into, the Lord graciously delivered us from all debt and gave me some much needed discipline at the same

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time. I wish I could say that the story ended there and that I continued in faithfulness from that day forward. Yet my covetous heart quickly led me to return to my old ways.

As with many people in their sins, I did not set out to deliberately disobey God. I simply found myself wanting something and I made some very bad justifications to convince myself that I was not sinning as I had formerly done. When the Lord had delivered us from debt, we were left with a positive sum of \$8,000. I didn't realize it at the time, but eight is the number of new beginnings, and God wanted us to start over fresh as we looked to Him to be our provider, and as we responded with willing obedience in all of our monetary decisions.

We only had one vehicle and I had wanted a pick-up truck for a long time. My wife and I talked about it and we decided that I should go ahead and purchase a truck while we had the money. I began looking around at both new and used trucks, and I found a new Mazda pick-up truck that was selling for about \$13,000. I really liked this truck, and I decided that I wanted to buy it.

I justified this purchase like this. If I put down a large down payment then I really wouldn't be in debt, for I could sell the truck at any time and get back more than I owed on it. Also, since I was now completely debt free, and I was still making the same amount of money as I did when I was in debt, I had lot's of financial breathing room and could easily make the payments on this truck, which would only amount to about \$150 a month. A third justification I used was that I had been told by relatives that buying used vehicles resulted in buying someone else's problems, so you should always buy something new. I had never really bought into this argument, but it provided appropriate justification for my covetous heart at that moment.

It is amazing how blinded we can become by our carnal desires. God sent me some clear indications that this was not His will, but I discounted them. I had a conversation with the elder I had spoken of before, Bill Martin, who was now living in another town, and I told him what God had done for us and that I was going to buy a new truck. He told me over the telephone that he believed I was making a mistake and was heading right back into that which God had just delivered me from. I repeated to him my list of justifications and he then replied, "Okay, I won't say anymore."

I could wish that Bill would have been more forceful with me, even to threaten to come down and give me a whipping if I acted so foolishly by returning to my error. But He left me in God's hands, and eventually God did give me the whipping I deserved.

God gave me one more opportunity to avert my course. My boss at work had a very nice Toyota four wheel drive pick-up truck and he heard that I was thinking about buying a truck. He approached me one day and told me about his truck, and, without knowing how much money I had available, he told me that he would sell his truck for \$8,000. In hindsight I have chided myself many times for not paying attention to what God was saying. I could have had a truck that was probably a better truck than the one I ended up purchasing, and I could have paid cash for it and remained in the will of God by not incurring any debt.

I acted very foolishly.

There is no nice way to put it. I acted very foolishly. Having been a partaker of God's grace and mercy, and having recognized His hand of disci-

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pline in my life, I returned to the same folly I had just been delivered from. Lest you should contemplate doing a similar thing, consider well the words of the apostle Paul.

Hebrews 12:11-13

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. **Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.**

What the apostle is saying is that if we do not respond rightly to the original discipline, “the limb which is lame,” then the discipline will get more severe, “the limb will be put out of joint.” Paul revealed this same progression of the severity of discipline in writing to the Corinthian church. He said “some are weak and sick, and some sleep (have died).” Even in our nation’s judicial systems we see this pattern adhered to. First offenders are often given a light sentence, but repeat offenders are treated much more harshly. Little did I suspect what was in store for me.

If we do not respond rightly to the original discipline..., then the discipline will get more severe.

I purchased this truck that I was lusting after, and it was not too long before I was justifying other purchases and I once more obtained credit cards. During these years I was receiving many raises at work, as I was advancing from one position to another. I never went back into the depths of debt that I originally knew, and I felt I was doing well by keeping on top of paying all of my bills, yet I was walking in disobedience.

During these years the Lord made it known that He had a calling on my life to be a minister to the body of Christ, and I was ordained as an elder at one church, and a year later I was ordained as an elder and pastor at another church. I really had a heart to serve God, and I was passionate about understanding the truths of His word, yet I had areas of my life that were out of order. I did not discern the many ways in which these areas of disorder were hindering me in fulfilling the ministry God had called me to, but God knew, and He loved me enough to choose to set matters straight.

I believe it was early in the year 1999 that my life began to head down a track I had not anticipated. The next years were to be some of the most beneficial, painful, instructive, corrective, enlightening, purging, fruitful years I would know. Pain and victory, sorrow and consolation, suffering and growth were all to be mixed together.

In early 1999 we had a couple visit our church and home by the name of Charles and Nancy Newbold. Charles is a Christian minister and author who lives in Tennessee. He had come down to our church in Georgia at the request of some of the other ministers to do some teaching. On this particular day, as Charles and Nancy were preparing to leave our home, they asked if there was anything they could pray for us about.

At this time I had been reading some books by Rick Joyner, and in one of the books (I believe it was “The Harvest”) he described a dream-like experience where he was taken to an island. On this island there was much activity going on, some good and some evil. There were two different types of people present, some who appeared glorious, and others who lacked this glory.

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Mr. Joyner described one particular scene on this island. He saw Jesus standing with a sword in His hand and there was a line of people approaching Jesus. When a man or woman would stand directly in front of Christ He would plunge the sword into the person and they would fall down and die. None of the people in this queue were glorious in appearance, yet after they died they would arise and take on an appearance of glory.

An interesting thing about this was that some people, upon having the sword thrust into them, would die quickly and easily. Others underwent what appeared to be long torments, being in continuous agony, never seeming to be able to die, but continuing in their suffering. As Rick Joyner observed this he asked the Lord what made the difference between those who died quickly and those who went on in continuing agonies. The Lord responded, “Those who die quickly are those who ask Me to put them to death.”

I was very much gripped by what I read, and the Holy Spirit was ministering to me all the time. I understood the substance of those things being shared. As children of God we all must embrace the cross, which is an instrument of death. We must all come to an end of our independent and selfish ways that we might live as Christ who said, “I never do anything of My own initiative. I only do the will of the Father.” The Holy Spirit was impressing upon me that I needed to come to an end of independence in my life that I might be qualified as a vessel of honor in God’s house.

I had been dwelling upon these things for some days when the Newbolds came to visit. I knew that if I wanted to go on with God, to enter into the fulness of those things He had laid up for me, that I was going to have to embrace a death to my many sinful and independent ways. I

knew I could not turn back from what the Spirit was speaking to me, for to turn back was to forfeit the good will of God for my life, which was a thought that I could not bear. I knew I had to go forward, and the path before me was one of death to the old man and his ways.

While contemplating these things the Spirit made it known that this path was absolutely necessary, and I considered, that since it could not be avoided, I would much prefer a quick death to a long and agonizing death. My answer to the Newbolds’ question was that they might pray that I would have a quick death.

When I shared this, both Charles and Nancy became very serious. They asked me, “Are you sure you know what you are asking for?” I assured them that I did. They then turned to my wife and asked her, “Are you willing to walk with your husband through whatever God will take him through.” Tony hesitated for a second, and then she said, “Yes, I am willing.” The Newbolds then prayed for us regarding this matter.

Just as Charles was about to go out our front door he turned to me and said, “You know, there are many ways the Lord can take us through a death experience, and one of them is to bring us to a financial death.” With these words he was gone and I was left with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. There is no doubt in my mind as I look back over the past years that Charles Newbold prophesied when he spoke these words to me. The Lord did have a financial death in store for us, yet I can only think how fitting and wise this was. If the Lord is to take us through a death experience it makes sense that He would choose the area of our greatest independence

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and lay it in the dust. The Lord will go straight to that which is the chief stronghold in our lives, for if He can deliver us from that which stands in greatest opposition to His will, then He can deliver us from all other things.

This pattern is revealed in Scripture. When the Lord led the children of Israel under Joshua's leadership (Joshua being a type of Yahshua,

The Lord will go straight to that which is the chief stronghold in our lives...

having the same name in the Hebrew) He led them to the city with the biggest, strongest, widest and most impregnable walls. He led them directly to Jericho.

This was to be the first battle for the Israelites in the land, and if they could capture Jericho then there would be nothing greater they would ever have to face.

The history of Israel going in to possess the promised land is not just a bunch of interesting stories given to entertain. They are parables of man taking possession of the land in which he dwells. Our flesh was made from the dust of the earth. It is this ground we must possess and rule over. We must drive out every enemy, tear down every stronghold, slay every giant, subdue all the wild beasts, until the land is made into a habitation of peace and righteousness. I had some real strongholds in my life, and the Lord Yahshua was preparing to lead me in to conquer the land.

I mentioned that at this time I was serving as a minister among a local body of believers, so there were actually a number of things the Lord was performing in my life. Not only was He seeking to deliver this son of His from the bondage in his life, but He was preparing me to be fit as a minister who could receive a much greater anointing. I was to undergo a scourging for my waywardness, but I was at the same time to be

fitted to enter into a greater calling than I had yet known.

The Spirit of God began to impress the following verse upon me at this time.

Luke 16:10-11

"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, how will he entrust the true riches to you?"

The Holy Spirit spoke to me that I must become faithful in my stewardship of money if I desired to receive true spiritual riches. If I could not be faithful in this unrighteous thing, this carnal and natural area of my life, then God would not be able to entrust to me the spiritual riches He desired to give to me. I yearned very much for true spiritual riches. I wanted God to open up to me the mysteries of His word and to endow me with a high calling, and an anointing to accomplish all that He would lead me to do. I wanted to be a vessel of honor in God's house as Paul described to his son in the faith, Timothy.

II Timothy 2:19-21

"The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

The Scriptures reveal that God has a high calling

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set before all of His children. He desires all to be vessels of honor, of gold and silver. Yet God is able to use many of His children only for common things, for they will not submit to His purging and purifying work. They avoid the working of the cross in their lives, and because they are unclean God must relegate them to being vessels of dishonor.

Consider for a moment that in a great house there are choice goblets of gold, encrusted with gemstones. These are brought out to be set before the highest nobility, and are shown off as vessels of great beauty and worth. Yet there are other vessels in the same house. There is common pottery that is used for waste baskets, spittoons, slop jars, and even for bathroom pee pots. God would choose all His children to be vessels of honor, but, if they will not submit to His refining work, He can only use them as vessels of dishonor.

I understood these things, and consequently I invited the Lord to bring me to a quick death to all that was wicked and evil in my life. I wanted to be a purified vessel, and as I was to find out, our heavenly Father is very willing to purge and purify all those who ask this of Him. The way has not been easy, and it has been attended by much pain and sorrow, but, as I look back, these experiences seem to have flown by. The memory of the painful things is now very distant and muted, and I feel washed by having endured the things the Spirit has led our family through.

Faith's First Steps

Before going forward chronologically in the story of our encounters with Christ, I must first go backward and share some things that are necessary in order to understand that which follows.

While I was still in my twenties, and fellowshiping at the church where I first learned the message of grace, the Spirit began to reveal a truth that was to profoundly affect my future walk with the Lord. He showed me through the types of the Old Testament that His salvation is a free gift, and even as Moses (who is a type of Christ) delivered the children of Israel from their cruel bondage and servitude in Egypt without their having to do anything other than place the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes, so too God provided salvation to us as a free gift that we cannot earn, but which we merely receive.

Under Moses, the Israelites were set free from their taskmasters, and through Christ, those who believe on His name are set free from the bondage of sin. The faith of many of the Israelites was very weak, for they had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. The faith of many saints is also very weak, for they have known only bondage to sin. Because of this slave mentality, many feel that they should not dare think themselves to be truly free of sin's hold upon them. Thus we see that when the Egyptians pursued Israel in the wilderness, that many among the Israelites doubted. They thought that the Egyptians would re-capture them, killing great numbers of them in the process. Even so, many Christians upon being freed from sin's bondage then doubt their freedom and begin to think that sin will once more gain dominion over them.

The Christian life is by necessity a life of faith.

The Christian life is by necessity a life of faith. We not only begin in faith, but we must continue in faith. In the beginning of our life in Christ God seemingly tolerates doubting much more than He does later on. The ideal of God is

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that our faith should grow, and never stop increasing. Yet this ideal is not always met. The Israelites, having seen God perform wonder after wonder in Egypt, culminating in the death of the firstborn of all Egypt, both of men and cattle, still doubted that

Many Christians spend their entire lives in the wilderness...

God would bring them to a fulness of salvation, and a complete deliverance from Egypt. When they stood before the waters of the Red Sea

with the Egyptian army behind them and mountains to the left and right, they murmured against God. They said, "Did Yahweh bring us out here to kill us because there were not enough graves in Egypt?"

God was neither glorified, nor pleased with this faithless response. Nevertheless, He delivered the people in spite of their murmurings. Moses spoke to the people, commanding them to be quiet, to "stand still and see the salvation of your God." Moses then stretched forth his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted and all Israel crossed over on dry land. We see that God was willing at this point in His relationship with Israel to manifest His provision for them **before** they demonstrated an attitude of faith. The people crossed through the Sea **after** they saw it part. Thus God manifested His provision without first requiring faith in the hearts of those He was saving.

We must keep in mind that Israel did not enter into the land of promise at this time. They only crossed over into the wilderness of Sin. So too God will bring many of His doubting children out of Egypt and into a wilderness of testing and trials, but He will not allow them to depart this wilderness while still filled with doubts and unbelief. Many Christians spend their entire lives in the wilderness, and perish there just as an entire generation of unbelieving Israelites did.

God does require faith from those who would enter into their promised inheritance. We see then, that when the people under Joshua entered the land God promised to Abraham, that God did not part the waters of the Jordan and then invite them to pass through as He had done at the Red Sea. No! He required that they take the first step, demonstrating faith **before** He would manifest His provision.

Joshua 3:13

"It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap."

God may allow murmuring Christians, filled with doubts and unbelief, to go as far as the wilderness where their hearts are proven, but He will not allow these same doubters to enter into the land of promise. Only those who walk by faith, and who demonstrate confidence in their Savior, can enter there. God will only reveal His way into the land to those who step forth in faith. In the wilderness the saints learn to no longer live by sight, and to no longer lean on the arm of the flesh. Here they learn to receive their daily provision from God's hand, and they learn to lean completely upon Him. When they learn the lessons of trusting God well enough, then they are led up out of the wilderness and into their inheritance.

Song of Solomon 8:5

"Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?"

All those who come up out of the wilderness must be leaning solidly upon Christ. This knowledge that faith was necessary in order to

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go on with the Lord began to dawn on me while I was a member of this Southern Baptist church where the message of grace was preached so vigorously. I observed many profound things while there. I saw many who grasped a message of salvation by grace through faith who became confident that they were saved from wrath and were children of God. Continuing the type from Egypt, they applied the blood of the Lamb to their lives, and felt secure from the death angel. Yet few demonstrated a practical faith that would have an observable impact upon their daily lives. They trusted God with their eternal salvation, but they did not trust God for their present needs. They were wilderness wanderers, and they were all dying in this land of unbelief.

I began to understand that God would test all of His children in the wilderness, to know what was in their hearts. Those who had faith in their hearts would be brought into their inheritance, while those who did not would perish in the wilderness. What is the means of this testing? It is the same as that experienced by the Israelites in the wilderness. God will test us in the physical circumstances of our lives. We can confess loudly and fervently that we trust God for our salvation, and for eternal life in heaven, but God wants to know if we will trust Him now by placing our lives firmly into His care.

It was while we were among these Christians that God first began to challenge our family to trust Him for things that men often look to others to provide. One early challenge He gave us was to trust Him for our security. We moved to a town near the church. My wife had told me she would never move to this town, for she had heard that there was much crime there. There was a security system in the house, and when we moved in my wife asked me if she could get it activated by taking out a contract with a security company. I neglected to pray about this situation, and wishing to please my wife, who did agree to move to this town with me, I gave her

my consent.

In our bedroom was a panel with lights that monitored all of the zones in the house. They were green when all was okay, and red when an alarm had been tripped. I did not know that my wife was lying awake night after night staring at the panel in fear that one of the lights would change from green to red. About a month after moving in, my wife and I were alone in the house, having sent our children to stay with some neighbors for the night. About 3 AM one of the alarm sensors tripped and a light went from green to red. Right outside our bedroom, on the outside of the house, was an alarm, and I had never heard it before. It was like a claxon siren that might announce a bombing raid, or the approach of a tornado. It was horrendously loud; loud enough to wake the entire neighborhood. It began blaring, and being awakened to such a noise from a sound sleep sent both my wife and I into a panic. The noise was so overwhelming that all I could think of was turning off the alarm. I ran to the panel and keyed in the security code to turn it off.

My wife was greatly frightened, suspecting that we had an intruder in the house. She went to our closet and took out a pellet gun that I had purchased as a play thing, and she handed it to me. I told her that I would have to shoot the intruder in the eyeball with it to do any good, so I handed it back to her and I grabbed a can of pepper spray, which is similar to mace. I did a search of the house while my wife called the police and went to the front door to wait for them. There was no intruder in the house, and after a thorough examination we found that a sensor on a front window had tripped. The children had been playing there earlier in the day and must have bumped it. Since the house was close to the road, it was

They were all dying in this land of unbelief.

Evidence of Things Unseen

probably just the vibration from a car going by that had set the alarm off.

My wife and I were very keyed up after all of this excitement, and had difficulty going back to sleep. I realized that God had gone before us in having our children stay with friends that night.

I was convinced that God wished us to lean completely upon Him...

This was something God wanted my wife and I to deal with. In the morning I spoke to my wife about the alarm system. I told her that it was not provid-

ing security. Rather it was producing fear. She then confessed to me that she had been lying awake for hours every night staring at the panel in fear that it would go off.

I shared my heart with Tony, telling her that the Spirit was indicating to me that we needed to entrust the security of our home and family to Him, and to cancel our security contract. Tony agreed, and we called that day and canceled it. I also threw away our pepper spray. I was convinced that God wished us to lean completely upon Him in this matter of our security and safety, and that anything else we leaned on to fulfill this same function would keep us from knowing God's provision. Eventually some opportunity would present itself where that which we trusted in would be tested. Therefore, I did not want to keep a gun in the house, or the pepper spray, or even the security system. I wanted to lean entirely upon God and look to Him to be our shelter and strong tower.

I had never owned an actual gun, just having had BB guns and pellet guns for my own entertainment to do target shooting. However, I considered at this time what it would be like to have a gun in the house. I kept coming back to the thought that if I trusted in a gun for the protection of my family, eventually God would lead me

to a time when I had to prove the value of this thing I was trusting in. Every scenario I could think of, in which I would have to pick up a gun and point it at another person for defense of myself or my family, left me recoiling at the visions of the aftermath of such an event. I decided that I would much rather place our security in God's hands, and trust Him to spare us from ever having to wound, or kill, another person. The Scripture, "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword" was much in my mind.

This was the beginning of many more steps of faith to come, where I would be led to trust in the love, kindness, mercy, wisdom and strength of God, while turning my back upon my own abilities, or the abilities of other men, to provide security, health and provision.

After canceling our security contract and disabling our home alarm system, as a family we went around the house and anointed the corners with oil. We then prayed together, asking the Father to be our security and to give us peace. That night was the first night my wife slept soundly in the house, and she was never disturbed again. We were to be at this house for three years, and even when some other people in the neighborhood had bicycles and other objects stolen, we never had anything of ours to be bothered with. This was the beginning of God leading our family to trust Him in matters of this life.

Mercy Amidst Discipline

An interesting thing occurred during our move to this house that I spoke of in the last chapter, the house with the security system. I had felt for some time that God would move us to this town which was called Fort Valley, and I had mentioned it to my wife some years earlier.

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We were home owners previous to this move, having lived in a small, but new home that had been built for us six years earlier in Perry, Georgia. It was at this home in Perry that I had been disciplined by God for my covetousness and financial debt, and it was also here that I had gone into debt again and purchased a brand new Mazda pick-up truck. I had converted a garage at this house into a family room, doing all the work myself, but spending a lot of money in the process, money which I did not have, but had to borrow. One of the reasons we were selling the home was to pay down our debts, which were starting to become burdensome again.

I had already taken some steps to reduce our debt. The pick-up truck that I felt I just had to have, I kept for only a couple years, and then I traded it on a used Geo Tracker. I loved the Tracker. It was a little, sporty, four wheel drive vehicle with a removable soft top. I loved driving it around with the top off, enjoying the Georgia sunshine and the fresh air. The Tracker was much less expensive than the pick-up, and I was able to pay for it in full and get a clear title to it. We had a second car at this time which we were making payments on.

Our house in Perry sold after being on the market for only thirteen days. We also got our full asking price for the house, and when we had paid off the debt incurred in remodeling the garage we had about \$6,000 to place as a down payment on another home.

We began looking for homes immediately, and through a strange chain of events we learned of a house that had been for sale for some time. Thieves had stolen the for sale sign out of the front yard, and the owner never had the sign replaced. There was no evidence that this home was even for sale. We contacted the owner, and he had already reduced the price tremendously, for the home market was depressed in this par-

ticular town, with many homes for sale and few buyers. We made an even lower bid, offering what we thought we could afford, using our \$6,000 as a down payment, and amazingly to us, our offer was accepted.

Since we had to be out of our home in Perry, as it had already sold, the owner of this home in Fort Valley agreed to let us move in before we closed on the property, and to pay rent until the closing date. God had given me a very strong witness of His will for us to be here, and He had gone before us up to this point. I knew we were to move in, although I had no idea how I was going to come up with the closing costs, which included appraisal fees, termite inspection, surveying costs, bank loan processing fees, and attorney fees. All told, our portion amounted to about \$3,600.

I was placing myself in a very vulnerable position by moving in ahead of the closing date, for it would be a great embarrassment to arrive at this date and not have the money on hand to pay these fees. Since I would already be in the house, I ran the risk of being asked to vacate with no idea of where I would go from there. On top of this, my mother lived just two doors down from this house, and she worked at a local manufacturing company in the same department with the man who owned the house.

I was placing myself in a very vulnerable position...

My mother became rather agitated when she found I had set a closing date, and had moved in without having the money on hand to pay the closing costs. She said that I would surely embarrass her greatly when that date came. I told her that God had confirmed to me that we were to move here, and I was confident that when the

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date came I would have the money in hand.

My confidence remained high, and as the days ticked by I was looking daily for God's provision. When we came to within a week of the closing date, and I still did not have the money, I then began to experience some troubling of my

God began showing me a pattern of His dealing with me...

soul. On the day before the closing date I still did not have the money and the thought came to me that I should go and see what I could get for my beloved Tracker.

I was in some perplexity at this time, and did not know if this was the voice of God, or if I should stand in faith looking for some other provision. In the end I decided to go and see what a dealer would give me for the vehicle.

The dealer I took my Tracker to checked the vehicle over thoroughly and then offered me \$3,600 for it. This was the exact amount I needed for closing on the house. I accepted the offer and then called my wife to pick me up. The next day we used this money to close on the house. I struggled for a while with thoughts of whether God would have manifested some other provision if I had not sold the Tracker, but over time I became convinced that it was God's will for me to sell this vehicle. I came to understand it as part of His discipline for my having gone back into debt again by buying the pick-up truck.

God began showing me a pattern of His dealing with me at this time. Before I had converted the garage into a family room at our previous home, I had bought a new ping pong table from Sears and set it up in the garage. I purchased the table on credit, and God never let me enjoy it. The garage was not air conditioned, and it was too hot during most of the year to be out in the garage without the door being opened. Our driveway

was sloped, and every time the ping pong ball would go out the door, which was often, we would have to chase it all the way down to the road. Added to this, the Holy Spirit would bring me conviction about my sin of buying this item through debt, and this conviction took all the enjoyment out of the game. In the end, the Spirit showed me that the only thing I could do was to get rid of the table because it had been bought through disobedience. I ended up giving it to a church for their youth group to use.

As I mentioned, I later converted this garage into a family room, and it turned out more remarkable than I could have imagined. It was simply beautiful. I put in a designer ceiling, and a ceiling fan, with air conditioning vents in this room. We insulated everything and put up some lovely paneling on two of the walls, with sconce lighting fixtures that I had long admired. On the third wall, where the large garage door had been, my wife and I hung a wallpaper mural over the entire wall that depicted a grist mill in the mountains of North Carolina with a flowing stream and autumn colors in the trees. We put down linoleum on the floor, and we even installed a propane fireplace with a beautiful mantel along one wall. Capping this off, I had installed wiring for a stereo and had wall-mounted some Bose mini-cube speakers that provided awesome sound. Across the back of this room I had installed full length accordion doors to divide between the family room and the utility room where the washer and dryer were located, and in the doorway leading from the house to the garage I had installed a swinging door with a stained glass window.

I had never done such beautiful work in my life, and once more God would not let me enjoy it because I had paid for it all by applying for a credit line at a local hardware superstore. The room had only been finished a short time when God's Spirit told me I was going to have to sell the house. Now, if the room had turned out

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poorly I would not have minded. But it was absolutely gorgeous. The mural itself was breathtaking and people would ooh and ahh when they walked into the room. God in His wisdom knows just how to discipline His children, and this child of His was not permitted to enjoy the fruits of disobedience. All my labor went to another man to enjoy. When God had me sell my pick-up truck, and then my Tracker, this pattern was continued. Those things purchased through debt and disobedience He would not allow me to keep and enjoy.

Even though God's hand of discipline was upon me at this time, so too was His hand of mercy and grace. Although I had to sell the house I had fixed up, He had another house prepared for us, and He provided just the amount of money we needed to move in. With His grace came some discipline, and the vehicle I loved was part of the price.

I was learning lessons through all these things, and I was seeing how important were both faith and obedience. When God wanted to lead us into some new thing He would require faith on our part. For every act of disobedience He would also administer His discipline. How wise a Father He is. He does not allow His children to run around uncontrolled without disciplining them. As Paul wrote:

Hebrews 12:8-10

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

Is it not a great manifestation of unbelief that so many Christians call God their "Father", but they do not believe He disciplines them? What kind of a Father would He be if He did not discipline His children? What would we think of a man who let his children run around like a bunch of hellions without ever correcting them? We would not think very well of such a man. It does not speak well of many Christians' conception of God when they do not recognize, or admit, His hand of discipline in their lives.

One thing I was to learn clearly in upcoming months and years was that, even when God disciplines us, He does not abandon us. I would not be a very good father if I told my children that they would no longer be given food, clothing, or a place to sleep while they were under my discipline for some infraction. No! I might put them on restriction, or give them a paddling, or ask them to make some type of restitution for their transgressions, but I would not withhold from them that which is necessary for them to live. Neither has God ever withheld any necessary thing from us during the times of our discipline.

Saints, I want to encourage you all to consider this. God is a much better Father than we are, yet Satan loves to torment us with thoughts that God has totally forsaken us due to some transgression. This is pure balderdash. There is not a thread of truth in it, yet I myself have spent many a worrisome day wondering whether God was still with me, filled with concern as to whether He would provide the necessities of life for my family and I. Listen to the words of Scripture:

For every act of disobedience He would administer His discipline.

Evidence of Things Unseen

Romans 8:15-16

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God...

Galatians 4:6-7

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son...

We are sons! Because we are sons our Father disciplines us. He does so because He loves us.

Hebrews 12:6

For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.

When we are experiencing the chastening hand of God, Satan will come to us and say, "God hates you. You offended Him now, and He has abandoned you completely." What a pack of lies! We should expect such deceit from the father of lies, but we should not believe him.

Certainly, if we do not respond with humble obedience to God's chastening, He will have to increase the severity of it, but He will never remove His love from us.

I love my son Josiah. He is now fourteen years old, and he is very precious in my sight. At times Josiah does things that require that I correct him. Because I love him and desire that he should fulfill God's purpose that he should be conformed to the image of Christ, I must disci-

pline him. At times he has continued in sin after being corrected, and I have had to discipline him further. The thought has never come into my mind that I should disown him, nor have I ever desired to treat him with indifference, or cruelty. I would always be delighted to see within him signs of repentance and sorrow over his sin, and my heart is to respond toward him in a way that will result in his greatest good. This too is the heart of our Heavenly Father.

Do not misunderstand me. There is a sin unto death, and Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers about some who had died due to their continuing in sin. Yet even this is an act of mercy on the part of God. To allow a son who is unrepentant in his sin, after many chastisements and much discipline, to continue bringing reproach to God and condemnation upon himself, would not be merciful or loving. Paul wrote of one such man among the saints at Corinth.

I Corinthians 5:5

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yahshua.

Notice that Paul's judgment is severe, but his goal is salvation. So too does God discipline us and, if we respond with a humble and repentant heart, then He is able to relent of the severity of the judgment against us. This was the case with this man, for Paul wrote of him again in his next epistle to the church at Corinth.

II Corinthians 2:6-8

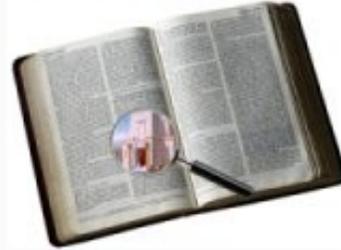
Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

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We must all, as children of God, be partakers of His discipline. How wonderful when we recognize the discipline when it comes. Do not think that because you are under God's discipline that He has forsaken you. No! He is watching you intensely, as a Father watches a son, to see if there is repentance and godly sorrow resulting from the chastisement. We are never more loved than when God disciplines us, for if we did not receive discipline it would be a sign that we are illegitimate children. Discipline is a sign of sonship. Let us shout out gladly when we are being scourged by God, "Hallelujah, I am a son!"

"Hallelujah,
I am a son!"

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The Bible is a compendium of 66 individual books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament.

King David and his son Solomon are two of the individuals we read about in the Old Testament. Do you know which of these two men wrote more

books of the Bible? The answer may surprise you.

Although there is more written ABOUT David in the Bible, David did not write any book in its entirety. David did write a large number of the Psalms which are found in the book by that name. The books of I Samuel and II Samuel focus much on David's life, but they were not written by him.

Solomon is credited with writing the book of Proverbs, although parts of the book were written by others. Solomon also wrote Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon.

Do you know who wrote the most books of the Bible? This

renown goes to the apostle Paul. Paul is personally responsible for having written 13 of the books found in the New Testament.

Which apostle after Paul wrote the most books? This would be John. John wrote the gospel that bears his name, as well as the three short epistles of I, II and III John. He also wrote the book of Revelation.

Can you name the other two men who wrote more than one New Testament book?

Luke wrote the gospel that bears his name, and the book of Acts.

Peter wrote I Peter and II Peter.