

*The Languages
Of God
By Les Carroll*

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DEDICATION

To my Mom and Dad, who always encouraged me in everything I ever put my hand to, no matter what the cost to themselves. To Dad, for spiritual wisdom and for giving me the story of Simeon and Anna which changed my life direction. To Mom, whose prayers have carried me through, and whose faith promised me that "Everything always works for the good."

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FOREWORD

Ahh.-.yes! Finally — a book by Les.

When I first met Les Carroll, something about him unsettled me. Here was a big, roundly jovial guy whose mysterious grin disappeared only for brief intervals to allow for healthy bites out of his barbecued chicken. Then there it was again, a baffling, buoyant expression that defied interpretation. It was as though the twinkle in his eye simply refused to be confined; it had escaped and taken over his whole face. Something told me that beneath this light-hearted bravado lay a hidden depth, some wise secret that begged to be unearthed. Curiosity drew me on, somewhat cautiously, into friendship.

To be friends with Les and Arlene Carroll was synonymous with adoption into the family. My husband Bob and I soon discovered we weren't alone in our choice of weekend haunts. The Carroll's place attracted a continuous string of characters: the gifted, the guilt-ridden, the abused, the confused, the renowned, the rejected, the churched, the unchurched — believers who failed to fit any conventional mold. It seemed no one was turned away.

Bob and I began keeping count of all the little miracles that seemed to occur so naturally in that loving home. Like the day we discovered that angels know how to tune guitars. An overnight amateur recording project at the Carroll's had been laid wearily to rest the first evening after I had wasted most of the day wrestling with the tuners on my twelve-string. For every string I brought up to pitch, another three would give way to discord. Just before retiring that night, Les gathered several of us to plead for the Lord's help. Early the next morning I found the guitar right where I had laid it, more accurately tuned than I could remember since I'd owned the thing. No one in the house had touched it. And, mercifully, the instrument maintained its perfect pitch for the entire day of recording. Another day, as supper time approached, I happened to glimpse Ariene privately handing

her last dollar to Les so he could run to the store. He returned with just enough chicken to barbecue for the eight or so of us who were lounging around the house, enjoying the fellowship. As we ate, unexpected guests drifted in, swelling the dinner count to over fifteen. But somehow the platter never emptied until the last one pushed away from the table, contentedly stuffed. It all happened so quietly that few realized what God had just done!

Supernatural guidance was a habit in that place. God's wisdom often came in a flash that pierced to the core of enemy deceptions with the accuracy of David's sling. And there were heart thrilling encounters: more than once, folks who didn't even know each other were prompted by the Holy Spirit to show up at the Carroll's house on a certain day. There they met, each astonished to discover they were walking through very parallel situations and trials. From a place of mutual sympathy, they brought comfort and wisdom to each other as no one else had been able to do. We watched hurting people repeatedly drawn there to be loved, lifted, and healed by Jesus — all through the direction and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

During laughter around the table, in the fervor of friendly debates by the back yard grill, while cheering Les on through sweaty projects involving everything from computers to carburetors, something within me stirred awake. I began to hunger for the spiritual freedom, the overflowing quality of life I saw surrounding this brother from Alabama. As I examined, probed, and prayed, the "secret" behind his intriguing countenance emerged into the obvious: Les and the Lord were simply at home with each other! God told him things. Not with thunderous pronouncements, but through inward heart-to-heart talks, as natural as co-workers swapping concerns over lunch. Les heard, he knew, he obeyed. Here was an imperfect, at times impetuous, loveably human servant who was letting us watch him grow in God. Whenever obstacles blocked his path, he held open, unabashed dialogues with the Father — risky interchanges which hammered out space inside him for whole new dimensions of

trust. Each fire of chastening seemed to reforge his faith into a brighter glow of confidence in Jesus, a keener edge of spiritual discernment, a hotter zeal for knowing his Creator.

In time, it became plain to all that Les' faith-fullness was treasured in heaven. Just as he and Arlene had freely opened their door to others, so the doors of the Kingdom began to open for them—into nursing homes, house meetings, prisons, churches, and retreats — wherever hearts hungered for their true "home."

Today, over twelve years later, we all still find our way now and again to the Carroll's' house. The life of God in Les has purified, intensified, caught fire in others like myself. Now we have our own stories to tell. Old friends mingle cozily with the new, sharing fresh discoveries, spiritual "battle reports," sometimes tearful burdens, of-ten songs of praise. And, of course, barbecued chicken. If you could sit there among us, after awhile you'd notice a funny thing: many of our faces have melted into the same amazing grin that you see on the big Alabaman sitting in the recliner over in the corner. The one who, for no reason at all, sometimes weeps when he talks with the Lord. For no reason at all — except maybe love.

Have you been longing to go after your share of the divine adventure? Then this book is for you. Go ahead, crack open these pages and prepare for God to surprise you.

Sherry Wanner
July 4, 1994

PREFACE

What an amazing time we live in! Communication has never been so easy. We can transmit messages, conversations, and even pictures around the world in seconds. In corporate board meetings everywhere, the major topic is how to improve communication. Clear communication is recognized as vital to good business and solid relationships. We hear news broadcasts of efforts to keep communication lines open with foreign governments. Communication is recognized as a key to good marriages and strong families.

How is your communication with God? Some of you would immediately answer that it's very good. You pray and read your Bible every day. You "go to church twice on Sunday and once in the middle of the week" (a line from an old southern gospel song). That is commendable; I do not want to demean those practices in any way. In fact, later chapters will explain the importance of such disciplines. The Lord uses His written Word, preachers, teachers, and prophets as vital communication channels, but they are only part of the whole plan. You see, God uses a number of different channels, or languages, through which He speaks to us. Some of these languages have been mostly forgotten or overlooked.

How can this be? Why would we suffer from such ignorance of God's ways? I believe the reasons range from laziness and apathy ("It's easier to let someone else do it!") to downright fear ("What if I make a mistake?" "Someone might think I'm a fanatic." "What if I listen to the wrong spirit?" "That sounds like New Age to me.")

We're often concerned that New Age doctrines will pull people into false teaching and away from God. But there is a trap worse than that: Because we shrink from anything that looks, sounds, or feels like New Age, we as God's people miss much that is priceless and true.

The fact is that Satan is not a creator. He is only an imitator. Everything he does is only a twisted imitation of what God has already created. If we see something the enemy is doing, maybe we should search around the Kingdom of God to discover what truth he is mimicking.

Many of us have yet to find this many splendored communion with God -- the very fellowship that Paul must have had in mind when he exhorted the Thessalonians, "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). We should not allow Satan to rob us of the wonderful "voice as the sound of many waters" (Revelation 1: 15, KJV), the numerous languages in which God is continually speaking to His beloved. The Lord has already set in place a safety net to protect us. In the chapter titled "The Safety Net," I will explain what that protection is.

I believe that communing with God takes place in two ways: worship of Him and practical dialogue with Him. Worship is a lofty subject and could fill volumes. Our lives should contain times of worship, both planned and spontaneous, in which we adore, praise, and glorify Him. He is worthy of such adoration. Our purpose here, however, is to explore that practical, ongoing, personal communication which guides us into the confidence and joy of knowing His mind and will in our daily walk.

As we begin, I pray that the Holy Spirit will open our spiritual eyes, ears, and senses to God, and to all that He has to say to us through His forgotten languages. I pray we will be enabled to accurately interpret what we receive through these various channels of communication. Let us be obedient to the beautiful hymn that must be His cry to us, "Commune with Me."

WHY

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:11, KJV)

This verse reveals to us why we were created. We were created for His pleasure. That seems simple enough. We could almost envision God sitting on His throne in front of a giant-screen TV with a remote control in His hand, entertaining Himself by flicking between the best of the performances down here on earth. We don't really believe He is like that, but sometimes we act as though it were true. Why can't more people recognize God's active, personal involvement in their lives?

I have gone to a few sporting events and really enjoyed them. There is something electric about being right where the action is, in contrast to watching it on television. For the same reason, I enjoy a live concert more than listening to a recording or watching a video. Why is that? A few years back, a friend of mine mentioned that he was headed for Fenway Park (during one of the Boston Red Sox' near misses at winning the World Series). I asked him, "Why would you want to drive there ? You can see it much more clearly on TV."

"That's true," he replied. "But it's not the same as sitting in the crowd, shouting directly at the players. I feel like I'm part of it. I can yell and root for my team and they can hear me. I feel I can make a difference."

He wanted to be involved. The players are thrilled that he and so many others want to be present and to take part. Performers depend on an audience to interact with their performances.

I take exception to the cute remarks of some people who say we are just an experiment and that someday, somebody will turn off the power. Our Creator is not looking down at His creation and occasionally pushing a button to see how we react. He is a Person who lovingly chooses to be a part of the life of every single creature He made. In Matthew 10:29, Jesus says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father." In Matthew 10:31, He goes on to say, "So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." This tells me that my God wants to be more than a distant observer in my life. He wants to be involved. More than just observing from the sidelines, He wants to be a player.

Two of my favorite Bible characters are Simeon and Anna, a prophet and prophetess who were always "hanging around" the temple at the time Jesus was born.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:25-26)

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. (Luke 2:36-37)

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. On that day, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple. Anna, of course, was already praying there, as she did continually. They both recognized Jesus, even though he was only a month-old

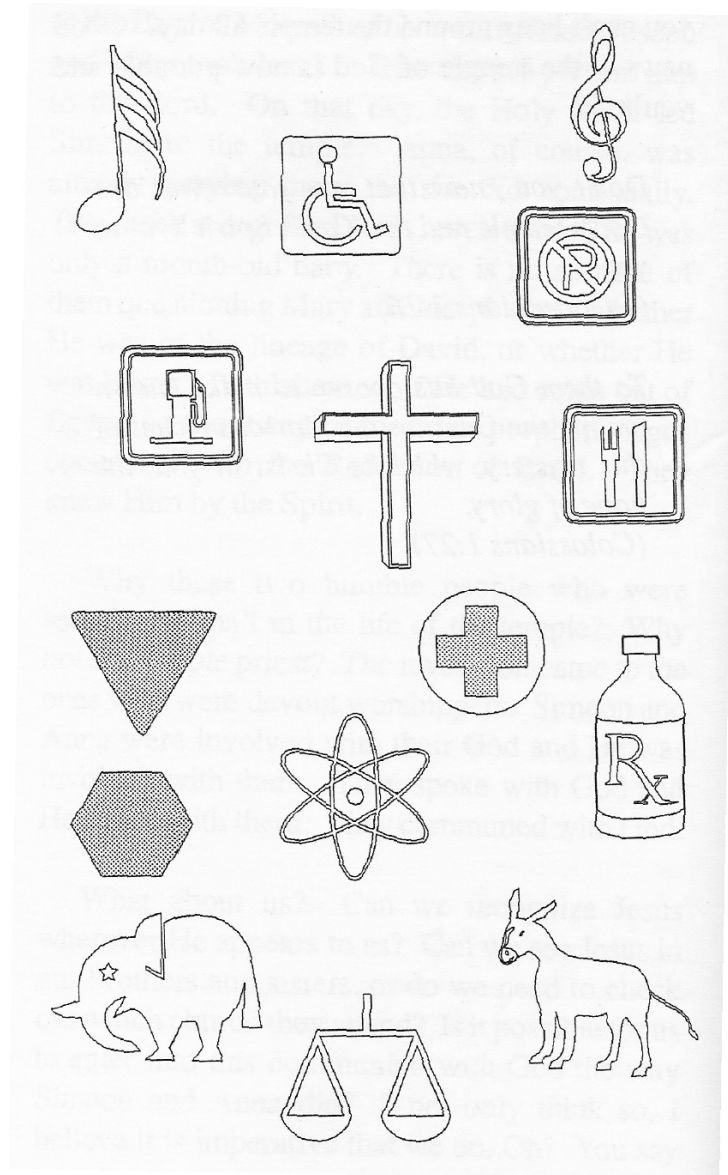
baby. There is no account of them questioning Mary and Joseph about whether He was of the lineage of David, or whether He was born in Bethlehem, or if He had come out of Egypt, or about any of the other prophetic signs connected with the Redeemer of Israel. They knew Him by the Spirit.

Why these two humble people who were seemingly small in the life of the temple? Why not the temple priest? The revelation came to the ones who were devout worshippers. Simeon and Anna were involved with their God and He was involved with them. They spoke with God and He spoke with them. They communed with God.

What about us? Can we recognize Jesus wherever He appears to us? Can we see Jesus in our brothers and sisters, or do we need to check out which church they attend? Is it possible for us to enter into this communion with God the way Simeon and Anna did? I not only think so, I believe it is imperative that we do. Oh? You say you can't hang around the temple all day? Good news -- the temple of God is now portable and you're it!

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?
(1 Corinthians 3:16)

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
(Colossians 1 :27)



SYMBOLS

Do you recognize the symbols on the previous page? Some of them are very important to know and are, in some cases, lifesaving. Many symbols cross language barriers because they carry the same meanings even in foreign countries. When quick recognition and immediate response are necessary, a symbol gets the message across. Think of the many symbols and trademarks advertisers use every day to prompt you to recognize and buy certain products.

God often chooses symbols to communicate with us. Even though these symbols form a language of their own, they also make up a significant part of each of the other languages He uses. For this reason, let's explore God's symbols as a basis for understanding the rest of His languages. Right from creation, God has employed symbols to speak to mankind. Early in the book of Genesis we see the first of these symbolic images:

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground -- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ... And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. " (Genesis 2:9,16-17)

Because the issue of Adam's and Eve's obedience centered upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that tree has come to be widely recognized as a symbol of God's authority.

In the following Scripture, we see symbols used in a dream given to Joseph. The sheaves of grain symbolized Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." (Genesis 37:5-7)

The following Scripture describes the interpretation of dreams that Pharaoh had. Here, grain is used as a symbol for the passing of years:

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine. It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do." (Genesis 41 :25-28)

It is interesting to note that both Pharaoh and Joseph had dreams which involved grain of some sort. Joseph himself interpreted both dreams; yet the grain had a different meaning in each case. How are we to get the interpretation of God's symbols if there is no dictionary of symbols handy? For the answer, look closely at Joseph's bold statement to Pharaoh: *Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it. "*

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41 :15-16)

It is God who gives the interpretation. Whenever we are confronted with symbols, we need to turn to His Holy Spirit for the answer. He keeps us dependent on Him and not on our own intellect. In the Old Testament (the old covenant), the Spirit of God would come "upon" certain people and endow

them with divine ability to accomplish His particular purposes. But under the New Covenant (the better covenant), we have the Holy Spirit continually alive within us. He gives us the divine wisdom to interpret our own symbols. Certainly we may find it helpful to have a trusted companion to guide us through our interpretation process. Yet we need to keep in mind that the symbol may mean one thing to one person and something entirely different to another, just as the grain stood for one thing in Joseph's dream and another in Pharaoh's.

God used symbols throughout the accounts recorded in Scripture and He has not changed. Although we usually associate symbolism with dreams and visions, they are actually woven into most of the languages of God, like a golden thread running through a fabric. Should we expect Him to use symbols in His dialogue with us? I think so. Let us be on the alert to what God might be saying to us through symbols.

LIFE

Did you think you had changed books when you read the chapter title? What has life got to do with hearing God? It is one of the languages. In fact, it could be the most important language. Through living our lives, we experience our need for God and the grace He offers through His Son.

Preconversion people fall into two categories: 1) those like a ship on a calm sea with a heavy keel, and 2) those like a boat in a rough sea with the keel broken off and approaching shipwreck. Both have a void in their lives that only God can fill. God is speaking to them by allowing them to reap what they sow. Let's take a closer look at these examples.

I

You have probably observed those heavy-keeled ships on the sea of life. Even when the water gets turbulent, they remain steadily on course, steaming ahead with confidence. They are the pride of the fleet and the envy of those around them. Seemingly everything is at their command. What could they need? They need to have a large void filled. We all have this deep void in our lives that swallows up every attempt we make to fill it.

The most profound and amazing accomplishments are just like the proverbial "drop in the bucket." The need to fill that bucket is often the very reason for the apparent worldly success of the seeker. It will drive this person from one successful venture to another. These seekers may even enter into works of charity, even within the church, applying their talents and abilities to help the less fortunate. Still the void remains.

This is God the Father, speaking to the seekers through their lives. He has created us with a void that only His Son

Jesus and the Holy Spirit can fill. He places opportunities, obstacles, and witnesses to His wonderful love in the path to constantly draw the seeker nearer to that glorious relationship with Him, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is through these life experiences that He speaks to the seeker, pointing the way to fulfillment.

The Apostle Paul may have fit into this category before his conversion on the Damascus Road. We know from various accounts in Scripture that he held a leadership position and had been given charge of men who would aid him in the persecution of the Christian church. In Acts 8: 1, he (named Saul at that time) gave approval for the death of Stephen. He had studied under Gamaliel, a highly esteemed teacher in the Jewish faith. Paul was considered a "Pharisee of Pharisees." (You can read his "resume" in Philippians 3:4-6 and then his estimation of his successes in the next verses.)

Even though Paul's conversion seemed to center around one dramatic encounter, I believe that his heart had been prepared in advance. He had certainly been exposed to the witness of the Christians he was persecuting. If Paul had felt fulfilled, he would not have responded to the call of the Lord. God wanted to be involved in Paul's life.

The broken, leaking boat on the stormy sea is a different story, but it has something vital in common with the steady ship: There is still that void that needs desperately to be filled. In contrast, however, everything that this person touches seems to sour. Problems and difficulties often plague their finances, their health, and their careers; all too often these include broken relationships. Low self-esteem and feelings of despair accompany all this. Still it is God speaking through this person's life. Even though God in His mercy sends healing and restoration to this seeker's life, this path may still seem unfair. Why the difference between the two?

The answer holds a major key to our understanding of the languages of God. We are each carefully and wonderfully made by a loving God - Who, by the way, is not into mass production.

Stamping out identical creatures from the same mold and lives that are all identical holds no thrill for Him!

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13-16)

We are all created amazingly different, not only in our physical appearance, but in our gifts, talents, and emotions as well. More than that, our God and Heavenly Father loved us so much that He gave us free will. This free will, planted within all of mankind, also shapes our character and entire personality. Our uniqueness makes it necessary for God to communicate uniquely with each one of us.

The result is still the same: a relationship with God. The void is filled. No matter which of the infinite number of paths the seekers find themselves following, they will be presented with the opportunity to exercise their free will and make a decision for Jesus and to receive salvation by His grace.

Now that you have made the right choice and received Jesus into your life, everything is just great. No more problems -- everything is in proper order, right? Did you say, "Wrong?" Well, I could come to you all sugary and optimistic, telling you that these situations are really just opportunities. But somehow they still feel like problems to me. I will not glorify trouble, hardship, and poverty. Neither will you find a teaching on principles for victorious Christian living here. And yet, if our focus is on hearing and knowing God, we will learn to treasure what He is constantly teaching us through the fabric of our lives. Whether or not your situation is resolved, woven through the whole process there is usually a message. Sometimes the message is very gentle; sometimes the message is startlingly strong. To Elijah standing on Mount Horeb, the message was as a "gentle

whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). To Job, God spoke out of a storm or whirlwind (Job 38:1).

After his conversion, the apostle Paul had some interesting encounters which directed him to exactly where God wanted him to be. Let's take a look at this part of Paul's story in the book of Acts:

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. (Acts 9:18-31)

In this account, there were two occasions when Paul was forced to change location because of threats on his life. In the first instance, he escaped Damascus to travel to Jerusalem, where he had the opportunity to meet with Peter and James (Galatians 1:18-19). The next time his life was threatened, he ended up in Tarsus, his hometown. While there is no account of Paul's activity during this time, we know from Acts 9:31 that it was a time when the whole church was enjoying peace and growth. It is my assumption that Paul, in the safety of his homeland, also grew spiritually during this season. Through these circumstances, God prepared the way for Paul and brought him to where he needed to be.

Do we dare call this communication? I think so. If we choose to exercise our free will and resist the direction God is leading us, it will be greatly to our loss. In Paul's case, it could have meant his life. God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, will usually continue to send the message. As with any communication, we can resist it and refuse to "go with the flow." Then the message typically gets stronger and louder, until it becomes the proverbial two-by-four.

The prophet Jonah received a commission and specific instructions from the Lord, yet chose to run from God's will. God did not prevent Jonah's flight; He honored Jonah's free will. But He did produce a storm and a big fish, which finally got Jonah's attention and caused him to decide it would be best to go to Nineveh and do what he was told. When God had compassion on Nineveh, it angered Jonah. Let's take up the story at that point and observe what the Lord did:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding

in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. No O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live. "

But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live. "

But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die. "

But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:1-11)

In this part of Jonah's story, an interesting word keeps popping up: "provided." The Lord God provided a vine, a worm, a scorching east wind, and the hot sun. What was the message? In this case, God wanted Jonah to see the condition of his heart as compared with God's own heart. In His mercy, God was communicating with Jonah about his own inner hardness. The Father loved this prophet and cared about Jonah's own spiritual condition as much as He cared about the sinful Ninevites.

A few years ago, I asked God to give me strength and wisdom concerning the secular work that I was doing. I trusted Him for a measure of success on a particular project I had been assigned. He anointed it with a double portion and sure enough, I was successful right through to the end of the project.

But with success came a new place of honor and responsibility, and it grew harder for me to let go of the thing that was demanding so much of my time and energy. When we're standing on a mountain top, it is difficult to hear the call of the valley and the plains. Suddenly, there were unexplainable performance failures. Stress began to build. A year later, I found myself in the hospital with a heart condition. Now God had my attention. This was followed by disappointing jobs performance reviews. All my attempts to find a new position failed. Finally, due to the economy and cost-cutting measures, I found myself without a job. I choose not to judge the company's decision, since I only see a part of the whole plan. But I know this: Since that loss, the sweet communion that I have with God has wonderfully increased. What joy fills my heart as I sense His presence!

After reading this chapter, a friend of mine said, "This really struck a chord in me. You see, neither of my pregnancies were planned; neither was particularly welcome. But both served to move me out of jobs that were not part of God's plan for me, both brought healing to my life, and they have put me in more of a position of total dependence on God."

Often God's communication through our life can only be recognized through hindsight. Yet hindsight is still divine revelation and should be seen as a great opportunity to give God all the glory. Through our personal history, we learn of His love and marvelous ways with us. Take time to reflect on the wonderful things He has done with you. Recall the way it sounded when He was speaking. When we know Him well, we more readily find ourselves in the middle of a tough situation saying, "Yes, Lord!"

LIVING PARABLES AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

Jesus would sometimes say to His followers, "It is like this." What followed would be a parable. These short stories could certainly have been true to daily life if taken at face value, yet they were filled with symbols and examples which powerfully illustrated the spiritual life -the Kingdom of God. Why did Jesus speak to His audience that way? Why didn't He just say what He meant "straight out"?

Fair questions. Remember, God wants us to follow His Holy Spirit, not our own intellect. To understand these stories, we need revelation from the Holy Spirit. I recall very well how Scripture came alive when I received Jesus into my heart and was filled with His Holy Spirit. What a change there was in my understanding! His promise to renew our minds is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit. Even now as we read Scripture, we should pray for the Holy Spirit to shine His light on God's Word.

Likewise, we should ask for wisdom to understand the living parables that we experience daily. These parables are occurring in our own lives as well as in the lives of the people around us. World events often have a "story behind the story." It is not always easy to recognize these messages from God. Just as it was with the disciples, we are often blinded to them by the symbolic method in which they are portrayed. Do you believe that God would speak to **you** in this way?

Most of us have heard pastors or teachers share incidents from their own lives, then relate them spiritually to their relationship with God. As you listened, were you thinking, "Why don't have experiences like that?" Maybe you were amazed at their insight. Did you wonder why nothing like that ever happens to you?

Well, maybe it does. I have found that it is a matter of being open to the language. Receiving revelation in this way seems to be something that we can grow into. Some of us always expect such revelation to be deep and profound. But our loving Father is also very concerned about the small details of our lives.

I was walking with my wife one day when she suddenly stumbled and said, "I have been tripping and stumbling a lot lately. I wonder if there is something wrong with my walk with God." At that moment she opened herself up to further revelation from God. The stumbling and tripping seemed to stop right away. In the months to come, revelation of an attitude brought on by a painful childhood experience was brought to light. The result was healing and growth.

Sometimes the living parable can be just an attention-getter, as in the story above. At other times, it may contain the whole message.

One cold January day after a snowstorm, I was out finishing up my snow-clearing chores when I noticed that one of the large pine trees in the front yard needed help. One of its branches had drooped near the ground and was caught in a snowdrift right near our front door. I decided to free it up and started to pull at it. It didn't budge. I kicked at the snow bank and pulled and yanked it some more. After working at it awhile, I realized that if this effort persisted, the limb would come out of this ordeal in sad shape.

As I stood back on the walkway studying this problem, the clouds cleared away and I felt the warm radiance of the sun on my face. I remarked to the friend standing with me, "If I leave this limb alone, eventually this snow bank will melt and the limb will free itself -- probably without any damage."

After contemplating it further, I had another thought: "I am like this with people I know. I am so persistent in setting them free from their bondage that they are probably being damaged by the pulling and yanking. If I would be more patient and loving, the **Son** would melt their hearts and they would be free." It

proved true and is still true today.

The examples shared in this chapter occurred within a short time of each other, and the message was made clear right away. But some messages are ongoing and can take days, weeks, and even months to unfold. Things that are happening in our jobs, our relationships, and our daily living can closely parallel what is happening in our spiritual lives. I have noticed that jobs and positions in business often change at the same time positions of ministry are changing. Battles which embroil us in the natural may symbolize a battle with our spiritual enemy, Satan.

In the same way, local and world events not directly connected to us personally may contain a parable for us or even for the whole Body of Christ. A few years ago the Gulf war was seen by some as being full of messages. The nations that came together against the common enemy could symbolize the various denominations that make up the Body of Christ. These nations did not have to give up their individual forms of government to become part of the coalition. Their unity overwhelmed the enemy. Some believe that we, the Body of Christ, do not have to give up our minor differences in doctrine to wage a unified battle against our common enemy.

I would suggest to you that these parables are all around us. Don't look for the complex and the profound. Look for the simple message. These simple messages are often more significant than they first appear.

LOVE LETTERS

What a wonderful Father we have to give us this great gift of Scripture! The Bible He gave us is true, accurate, authoritative and inspired by the Holy Spirit. I could fill the page with adjectives to describe this wonderful Book. We have been entrusted with the wonders and powers of the written Word of God.

Let me share with you a view of Scripture which has deeply enriched my personal study of the Word. I call it the "love letters" of the Lord. You see, as I am built up spiritually through the many books and study guides written to help us to understand this magnificent Book, and as I listen to anointed Bible teachers and scholars, I try to keep in mind that God's main intention is to send me a personal love letter from His heart.

Over thirty years ago, I had the joy and sorrow of receiving love letters from my "then-to-be" wife. Sorrow, because we were separated from one another; joy, because we had this wonderful channel of communication open to us. We had met only a few months before I was to sail to northern Europe on a Navy ship. In those few months, we discovered just how much we enjoyed each other's company and spent every moment we could together. Although we talked a lot, we often found that other forms of communication would distract us. (I will say that we were both Christians and waited until our marriage before opening "all" forms of communication!) This was a season of really getting to know each other.

Her letters were something different. In them I could see and hear the words of my beloved in a fresh light. With the words on paper, I was not distracted by her outer beauty. Now I could really concentrate on her inner beauty. I could see and understand her character and the lovely person she truly was. The letters made me more conscious of her

feelings, whereas when we were together I was mostly conscious of my own feelings.

Early in my Christian walk, I came to view Scripture in a similar way. I receive the written books of the Bible as love letters from a God who loves me and cares for me. Through this written language, I can sense God's feelings and emotions. I can understand that He is a jealous God, a just God, a forgiving God. I can learn of His character.

Scripture can help guard us from error and lead us into all truth. But there are times of doubt when we don't have chapter and verse at hand to guide us. What do we do? Know His character. What would Jesus do in this circumstance? Let's look at some Scriptural accounts of His life:

5} So he {came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

{6} Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

{7} When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

{8} (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

{9} The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10} Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. "

{11} "Sir" the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living

water?

{12} Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

{13} Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,

{14} but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. "

{15} The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. "

{16} He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back.

{17} "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband.

{18} The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true. "

{19} "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet." (John 4:5-19)

Now there are those who see prophets as rigid, tough, abrupt people. This woman clearly recognized Jesus as a prophet. But how did the Son of God actually come across to her as a Person? By observing this woman's response to Him, we can pick up some revealing clues about His tone of voice and demeanor toward her.

We know from verse 9 that the Jews and Samaritans didn't

get along too well. So why didn't this Samaritan woman respond with: "Look Jew, draw your own water. Do I look like your slave?" Jesus' request for a drink of water (v. 7) could have been taken as an arrogant command, had He used a certain tone of voice. Instead, she found herself drawn into meaningful conversation with One Who should have been her racial enemy. The kindness with which this person approached her was completely unexpected. Jesus continued patiently, teaching her new truths and finally setting her up with the opportunity to confess the hard truth about herself (vs. 16-17). When He pushed her to the heart of the issue, she still addressed him with respect by calling him "Sir. "

So ... from this we can conclude that Jesus was always gentle. ALWAYS? Hmm ... maybe we had better look at some other Scripture.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:13-16)

Now we are confronted with a very different emotion emanating from our Lord, in the very same book as the encounter with the Samaritan woman, the book of John. We could talk about the moral principles behind this recorded event, but there is deeper meaning in this passage. God wants to increase our awareness of Him, to reveal the richness of His own character, emotions, and nature through these "love letters" of the Bible.

Many of us have probably attended courses similar to one I attended years ago called "What the Scripture Says About Itself." The following is often the key passage for such a course:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and

have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Once we have received His Spirit within us, our own spirit witnesses to the Scripture's claim about itself. Luke 24:45 says, "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." In John 16:14, Jesus talks about the work and the promise of the Holy Spirit and His power to reveal: "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." It is He who must open our minds to grasp the mysteries of His written Word.

All of us who look into the Scriptures need to pray humbly for enlightened understanding of what we read and study. We have this warning from Peter:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

When we pride ourselves in our intellect, we can easily fall into using Scripture as a means of flexing our mental muscles to amaze those around us. From time to time, national networks have brought us sad news of leaders whose intellectual interpretation of Scripture and powerful communication skills have drawn large groups of people down with them into tragic error. Paul warns repeatedly that the Scripture ministered by the letter of the law will bring death, while the same Scripture ministered by the Holy Spirit will bring life. This alone should attest to the awesome power of God's Word. I pray we will

choose life by depending on the Spirit to reveal to us the mind and heart of the Lord through His Word.

I have encountered people who enjoy intense worship times and seem to touch God in all His splendor. While these experiences are edifying and enviable, I have also noticed that some of these same people are easily led astray. When I examine more closely their walk with God, I often find that they are not well-grounded in God's love letters.

Then there are those who only approach Scripture through their intellect. Without worshipful, intimate relationship with Him, these too are easily led astray. Indeed we do need a time of disciplined study in His written language of love to us. During times of reflection on His Word, we can set aside the distractions of our own feelings and allow Him to show us His.

On Marriage Encounter weekends, husbands and wives are asked to write honest letters to one another so they can learn to recognize their partners' feelings. How much more, as the Bride of Christ, should we hunger to absorb the exquisite love letters written to us by our heavenly Bridegroom!

WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

"I should give Joanne a call."

"I think I'll drop in on Bill and see how he's doing. "

"Maybe I should take the back road today."

Thoughts. Where do they come from? Many thoughts are simply part of our natural reasoning process, with one thought leading to another. This process is at the heart of creativity. The result can be a beautiful work of art, an enlightening piece of literature, some brilliant technological marvel, or a delicious new cookie recipe. What a wonderfully mysterious process goes on in our brains all the time!

How this thought process works is still one of the great enigmas of God's wonderful creation. You will hear very few scientists expounding new theories about how thought takes place within our minds. Oh, they all acknowledge that thought happens, but how? I don't know either! Not very long ago (when I knew "everything"), I probably would have attempted to answer this question. Thank God I seem to have lost most of that kind of "knowledge and wisdom." Now I am awestruck at the marvels of His creation. A few years back, my curious mind progressed from wondering how the thought process works to seeking to understand how God can use it.

"I was really lucky," you might say. "It just popped into my mind and I did it!" Lucky? I wonder. Have you ever heard the joke that goes, "If it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have any luck at all"? I don't have any luck at all, good or bad. You see, as a Christian I believe that everything has purpose. And that viewpoint alone may help to answer our question, "Where did that come from?" Things do "pop" into our heads. Could they be from God? Let's explore the possibility.

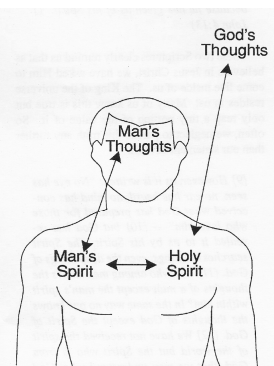
Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. (1 John 4:13)

These two Scriptures clearly remind us that as believers in Jesus Christ, we have asked Him to come live inside of us. The King of the universe resides in us! Many of us know this is true but only reap a tiny portion of the value of it. So often, we neglect to pursue this truth any further than our statement of faith.

{9} However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -- {10} but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. {11} For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. {12} We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. {13} This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13)

Verse 10 says that the "mystery" mentioned in the previous verse (also see Isaiah 64:4) has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. How is that possible? The two main points of verse 11 shed much light on the matter. First of all, it states that our spirit knows our own thoughts. Secondly, the Holy Spirit knows God's thoughts. Our spirit is linked into our thoughts and the Holy Spirit is linked into the thoughts of God. Verse 12 points out that we have received the Spirit Who is from God. The same verse reveals the purpose of



this gift: "that we may understand what God has freely given us."

Can you see it? The Holy Spirit teaches us spiritual truths in spiritual words (v. 13). These Scriptures explain how our spirit is linked to the Holy Spirit; therefore our thoughts are vitally linked to God's thoughts. Read these further confirmations from Scripture:

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." (Hebrews 10:16)

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (John 16:15)

God's Word contains a record of how the apostles were led here and there by the Spirit, but it is not always clear which of God's languages led them. Here is one account from Acts that I find interesting:

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. (Acts 16:16-18)

We know that Paul was an apostle and had the gift to discern spirits. So, why did it take him so long to correct this situation? Put yourself in Paul's place as you watch the story de-

velop. This slave girl obviously had some spiritual oppression; but at the same time she was speaking the truth. That could have caused some confusion in Paul's thought process. Here is God saying, "This person has an evil spirit" and the natural mind of Paul saying, "But she is speaking the truth."

Did you ever have an argument with yourself? Ah ... but was it really yourself you were up against? You may want to believe that Paul's spiritual maturity was beyond such a scenario, but he was a human being in God's training program, just as we are. After many days, he figured out that there was a distracting, mocking spirit speaking through the girl and took authority over it. Remember the clear-cut revelation to Paul on the Damascus road? God spoke to him in an audible voice, and those traveling with him were also shaken by the sound. This case involving the slave girl was far more subtle. A struggle may have been going on in Paul's thought life.

Recently, a thought came to me on the way to an appointment in a town about 20 miles away. As I was headed for the entrance to the interstate highway, the idea struck me, "Why don't I pass this exit and go up the back roads on Route 85?" My next thought was, "Where did that come from? That way will take forever." I pushed the thought out of my mind as I cruised off the entrance ramp onto the interstate.

Before I knew it, I had come to a dead stop. The interstate had become a parking lot. As I sat there creeping along with traffic for the next 45 minutes, I began to replay the thoughts that had entered my mind while I was still back on the secondary road. First came anger at myself for not listening. Then there was the repentance for not being obedient. And finally, the joy of knowing that my God loved me enough to talk to me.

Some might question whether God would be interested in such a minor thing. A close friend would have forewarned me if possible, and my God is so much more than that to me. I believe He patiently uses such incidents to grow my relationship with Him, teaching me to recognize His voice. God's personal love and tender concern for my everyday life came through to my heart in the middle of a traffic jam.

At other times, thoughts may come which will be used to press us into the service of ministry to the Body of Christ. Surely many of you can recall when a sudden desire to talk with a friend or acquaintance surfaced in your mind. On following through, you found a real need that you could fill. You know these thoughts -- they go something like this: "I think I'll turn down this road and drop in on Bill. I haven't seen him for a while." "I think I will give Mary a call." Your feeling at that point may have been pure personal pleasure as you anticipated a happy time of fellowship. Yet perhaps unexpectedly you found yourself counseling or comforting someone in a time of need. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." At first glance, it's easy to read into this statement the meaning that He will give you what you want. But from a deeper viewpoint, I think it means that because you love Him, He will first take His desire and make it your desire, planting it deeply there in your heart. Then He will give you the joy and challenge of waiting and watching until He fulfills it!

Many marvelous outpourings of Jesus' love through His Church have begun through this simple but effective language. With this language especially, it is often easier to recognize His voice "after the fact." I have observed people who were waiting and hoping for God to ignite a bush in front of them so they would know that it was Him speaking. And yet the same people would already be responding to the desires of their heart and thus (often unawares) performing great service for our King.

Some time ago we were invited to minister at a home meeting located a good distance away in Connecticut. The couple who were hosting us for the weekend love the Lord and we all enjoy one another's company. The husband, however, feels uncertain about the zeal that some of us enjoy in our relationship with the Lord. As we were talking on a Saturday afternoon, however, he related an amazing story to me. He was on a temporary job as a mover, packing and transporting a household in New Jersey. The woman of the house was very demanding and generally a difficult person to deal with. He soon decided he didn't care too much for her. Even after

he found out she was dying of cancer, he had a hard time changing his attitude toward her.

At the completion of the job, he found himself in the back of the truck packing up the furniture pads. Suddenly something swept over him and his attitude softened. As he and his crew were leaving, the husband gave them all a tip. My friend thanked him and started to walk away. He suddenly turned around, walked back and looked the man in the eye, saying, "Your wife is going to be all right." Then he turned, walked to his truck, and drove away.

A week or so later, the husband called the moving company and wanted to know who this person was. His wife had been suddenly and miraculously healed of her cancer! They wanted to know how my friend could have known.

That night, as we were holding the meeting, I made one of those "and God told me" statements. My friend interrupted me immediately with the complaint, "I have been asking people for years what it is like when God speaks to them, and no one has given me a satisfactory answer. What did it sound like when God spoke to you?" I looked straight at him and said, "Exactly the way it did when God told you that the man's wife was going to be all right." He was stunned. God had spoken powerfully to him, and yet it was still difficult for him to realize it. After a long pause he said, "Now I know. You have answered the question."

Not every thought you have is from God. To some, that makes listening to this language seem a little risky. You are not able to prevent the entrance of thoughts that are not from God; and in the same way, you are not able to prevent the thoughts that are from God. Why not try to gain His best from it and use this language to draw closer to Him?

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Paul is telling us that we can take our thoughts captive. When a thought comes into my mind I can capture it, stand it alone, examine it, and then make it obedient to Christ, no matter where the thought came from. That may mean putting it into action if it is from God, or throwing it out if it is from the wrong source. Sometimes I need to closely examine the argument going on in my mind and discern which side God is on!

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

As we grow to know Him and trust Him more deeply, we will more easily recognize the voice of our wise and faithful Shepherd when His Spirit's call echoes in our own thoughts.

AMBASSADORS

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-15)

The language of God's ambassadors may be the most familiar one to most of us. Paul lists various types of spokesmen in this passage from Ephesians. We are usually quite aware of God speaking to us through the ministers He has specially ordained and gifted to share His heart with His people. Many of you will consider yourselves to be on the receiving side of this language. Some of you may view yourselves as on the giving side. The fact is, every one of us functions on both sides of this language.

Even though you may never find yourself standing before the multitudes, proclaiming the glorious mysteries of God, the time comes when every one of us, as His witnesses, will find ourselves in that position with some individual or small group. We can all testify to the great spiritual riches, which make up our inheritance in Christ. All of us, regardless of our gifts, talents, or offices, can assume this position of ambassador for our Lord.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5 :20)

To be an ambassador is to act as an authorized representative or messenger. If you have followed current events of the past few years, you have observed the importance of the position of ambassador. An ambassador's actions and words can sway entire nations. Improperly communicating the desires and intentions of the government the ambassador represents can cause strife and even wars. To be successful, an ambassador cannot act in his own best interest; he must act only in the interest of the authority he represents. Any form of grandstanding for personal gain can result in the demise of the ambassador and the government he represents.

As new covenants and treaties are brought about between nations, it is the ambassadors who do the initial communicating and bargaining. At the appropriate time, a leader or king will call a summit so he can speak directly with the head of the nation or nations who are partners in the negotiation. By doing so, he ensures that his intentions and heart have been correctly communicated.

It is an awesome responsibility to be one of God's apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers. Their calling is to accurately communicate the heart of their King to those destined to receive their ministry. Tragically, we have witnessed what happens when these ambassadors become self-seeking. The responsibility of such failures is often not all their own. When we become awestruck by the messenger, we may neglect to hear God calling a summit.

We often lose sight of the true purpose of God's ambassadors. In the opening Scripture for this chapter (Ephesians 4:11-15), this threefold purpose is clearly defined: 1) To prepare God's people for works of service, 2) to build up the Body of Christ toward the goal of reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and 3) to bring us to maturity, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We are to grow up, no longer remaining infants to be tossed back and forth by intriguing ideas and doctrines. We can take root and grow because we are in Him who is the Head; that is, Jesus. Whether you are an infant, adolescent, or adult in the family of God, remember that when God has engaged you with the language of His ambassadors, you are not to elevate the messenger higher than the Source. Many of us confess this principle with our mouths, but we must also know it in our hearts. Paul speaks clearly of his role as a vehicle for God's message:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.
(1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

As we hear the messengers of God, we must remember to keep our eyes on the Source of the communication. We must take our focus off the messenger to see the true Author: God the Father.

When I am faithful to keep fixed on the Lord alone, I notice new messages coming my way. Interestingly enough, these messages may not even be the intent of the ambassador. Perhaps the principle of radio transmission will illustrate what I mean by "unintentional messages."

Radio reception is made possible through radio transmitters, which are devices that combine two energy waveforms together. The first waveform, called the "carrier," cannot be heard through the radio receiver. However, the transmitter modulates, or combines this "carrier" wave with the second wave -- the wave we can hear. The audible wave is carried to the thousands of tuned-in radio receivers by the inaudible wave. Our radio separates or demodulates the two waves and

delivers the one we can hear to our ears.

Sometimes the way we hear God through His ambassadors is like that. The messenger, acting as the transmitter, delivers a message to us. However, the Holy Spirit, acting as a radio, may demodulate the message and allow a very specific message to be brought forth to our spiritual ears. This message may seem quite unrelated to the message that was used as a "carrier."

I have both experienced and witnessed this phenomenon personally. I am amazed when, after sharing a teaching or exhortation, people come up to thank me for some truth I spoke forth, sharing how it affected them. I have often thought to myself, "They missed the whole point!" But after further examination, I decided that it was I who missed the message they received. This happens when the receiver is "tuned in" to the true Source and not glued to the transmitter.

Once we accept the message as coming *through* the ambassador from a higher source, it frees us to find and partake of the "living water" in any fellowship, regardless of the their form of worship or style of delivering the message. Keep your heart inclined toward the Holy Spirit as you listen to His apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Through them, He will fill your life with precious and timely truths prepared from His throne just for you!

DONKEYS, HUSBANDS, WIVES, FRIENDS, AND OTHER UNEXPECTED CREATURES

*But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the **LORD** stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the **LORD** standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.*

*Then the angel of the **LORD** stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the **LORD**, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again. Then the angel of the **LORD** moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the **LORD**, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. Then the **LORD** opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"*

Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now. "

The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"No," he said.

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. (Numbers 22:22-31)

Isn't this a delightfully funny story? It is also deadly serious. This story brings great joy to my heart every time I read it. That He is able and willing to use any part of His creation to communicate with us illustrates the amazing ingenuity and humility of our loving God. This account of God's confrontation with Balaam in the book of Numbers reveals His patient willingness to deal with even the very corrupt. It is worthwhile reading indeed.

Have you ever had a donkey in your life? (If I translate the word "donkey" into King James English, perhaps some of you could relate more readily!) God can and will use a limitless number of instruments to get through to us. The more stubborn we are, the more shocking these instruments may be. Balaam was so determined to go ahead with *his* plans that he failed to notice what was really going on around him. His own donkey had to remind him that her behavior on that road was far from normal, and made it clear that Balaam should have known that.

When events start happening which jar you from your normal mode of operation, is your big concern that you might look like a fool, or do you stop to ask, "Lord, why is this happening to me?"

Did you note that Balaam's balking donkey provided him with a picture of his own hostility toward God? In the same way, God may grab our attention with one of His more subtle languages, such as this living parable to Balaam. But then He may proceed further by jolting us with direct speech in our native tongue, coming from some highly unlikely source. For Balaam, his donkey worked nicely. For you, this unlikely source may be someone you don't even like very much. God could use your contentious boss, or someone who is subordinate to you. You may consider it out of the question, but He *might*

even use your spouse! Do you believe that our God might even speak to a believer through his or her own children, relatives, and yes -- even through a spiritual brother or sister?

At this humbling level, God's communication is often missed. There are a number of reasons for this. Most often, as in Balaam's case, it is pride. The donkey was making a fool of him in front of those traveling with him. Others miss it because they cannot accept that our holy God might choose to speak through an ungodly creature or person. Yet others, unwilling to yield to Him their everyday lives, simply "turn the receiver off" outside the church.

While I was working for a computer company a few years ago, I was asked to watch a videotape which was specifically designed to stir up creativity. The instructor on the video explained that people who produce new inventions or create new concepts usually think outside of man's paradigms. He defined a "paradigm" as a pattern of how things are "usually" done. Most people will simply try to improve on this established pattern. The true inventors, he said, are only bound by the laws of nature and not by the traditions and laws of man.

It suddenly occurred to me that it's just the same in the Kingdom of God. Those with fresh new revelation are the ones who are not bound by man's laws and traditions, but are bound only by God's Word written in their hearts.

From the time I first viewed it, this tape has continued to have a profound effect on me. I have no idea whether or not the man speaking on the tape was a Christian. Yet from the standpoint of the message I received, it wasn't important. I heard what God was saying.

I recently listened to an interview, which featured a movie actor/producer. The interviewer asked him which was more important: To produce a good movie, or to be loved by the talent in the movie. He very quickly replied, "It's more important to love than either one of those." That statement caused me to examine my own ministry. Am I concerned first about being

loved, or about performing well? Or have I truly made it my priority to love those who are my ministry?

A couple of years ago, my daughter shared this little story about my grandson Jimmy, who was five years old at the time. One of the women at church was talking to Jimmy about Jesus (in the typical fashion that adults talk to children about God). In the midst of the conversation, Jimmy made this comment: "Jesus is my heart." She corrected him by saying, "Don't you mean that Jesus is *in* your heart?" He replied emphatically, "No, He *is* my heart."

In a later conversation, his mother learned that he accredits every beat of his heart to his Jesus. I am still not sure that I grasp the depth of Jimmy's concept. I think of Galatians 2:20 which says:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The message I have received through Jimmy is that I need to resist growing complacent about my relationship with the Lord. There is always something new and refreshing in knowing Him. God speaks through donkeys more frequently than we realize. Tuning in to this language may require some uncomfortable humbling, but it is well worth it. Let us open our eyes and ears to recognize Him in loving disguise and receive hidden treasure from the sovereign God Who faithfully conforms us to the image of His Son.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

I was outdoors in a large open field, talking to a man. The sky was beautiful with large, fluffy, white clouds billowing all over. The blue and the white were equally proportioned.

Behind the man, I noticed a man walking on one of the clouds. He walked right over to the edge of the cloud. I was aware that it was Jesus. His right arm moved up from His side and I could see that He had a ball that was about the size of a baseball.

I thought, "He is going to throw that ball to me." At that moment, He reached way back and let the ball go in a high arc toward me. As it traveled toward the earth, I could see that I would have to reposition my self back and to the left in order to catch it.

As I made my first movement, I was alarmed. I was lying on my back! Not having enough time to get to my feet, I squirmed and slid, pushed and crawled on my shoulder blades to get underneath the ball. But I missed it! Then I woke up.

This dream both intrigued and alarmed me. I knew immediately that it had come from God and represented some kind of warning for me. I had to know what it meant. I struggled inwardly for several weeks before it's meaning finally became clear to me.

In a previous chapter, I pointed out that God often speaks to us in symbols. While a few dreams are objective, with a clear and straightforward message, my own experience is that God prefers to use imagery. He wants us to function humbly as spiritual men and women, not as analytical, intellectual giants. By speaking in symbols, the Lord teaches us to rely on His Spirit to reveal their hidden mean-

ings. As we study how all the symbols work together to convey a dream's message, the Father invites us to call on His wisdom, with the promise of His sure response (James 1:5).

I usually begin by isolating some of the major symbols in the dream in order to discern the particular meaning of each one. Then I examine how these symbols tie together to convey a certain thrust or message. Often the interpretation will come quickly once the meanings of some of the symbols are made clear. We can see from Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream that a symbol may mean one thing to one person and something different to another person. How can we know what they mean? Simply ask the dreamer, "What meaning does this image trigger in your own memory?"

But forgive me -- I have left you in suspense about the meaning of my dream, haven't I? Let's revisit the dream, using it as an example of how God communicates truth to our spirits through subconscious images. Upon waking, my first impression was, "I must be lying down on the job." While that idea was not far wrong, it did not convey the full meaning of the dream. (I have learned always to push past my first impressions, simply because they can easily spring from emotion rather than from genuine spiritual insight.) So I went to work on the symbols.

In this particular dream, the two symbols that carried the most weight in my mind were: 1) the ball, and 2) my position. I could easily connect the image of Jesus throwing the ball with some new work or ministry that He had for me. But it took weeks to pinpoint the meaning of my awkward position. At first I pondered the meaning of my landing on my back when I went to catch the ball. But the breakthrough came when I began to consider where I had been located on the field when the Lord threw it. It dawned on me that there was an adjustment in my position that needed to be made in the first place.

I proceeded to examine my position in life. At that time, I was running a business (and still do at the writing of this book) in which I served as a computer software consultant and trainer. Also, my wife and I have been very active in ministry for

a number of years. Although we have remained open to a calling and commissioning from the Lord for full-time ministry, we have refused to become anxious about it. If someone had asked me what I did, I would have answered, "I am a software consultant."

As I reviewed the current pattern of my life, the dream's meaning began to zoom into focus. It was as if someone had turned on the lights in a dark room, or a heavy fog had just lifted. (This is sometimes called the "AHA!" stage of the interpretation.) The questions loomed before me: Who am I in the Kingdom, and who am I in the world? I recalled the face of the man I had been talking to in the field and recognized him as one of my business clients. This caused me to begin wrestling with the possibility that it might be time to lay down the business and go into full-time ministry. But then I was reminded that even the Apostle Paul made tents for a season. When I finally decided to view myself as an exhorter, teacher, and evangelist who made tents, I found myself no longer lying on my back, out of position. It became clear that God wanted to correct my view of myself as primarily a software consultant. Until I could see myself as first and foremost His minister, I was not flexible or mobile enough to make the necessary adjustment in my position to receive the anointing that God would send my way.

Nothing in my exterior life appeared to change. The message God was sending me through this dream had nothing to do with what I was doing; it had to do with the attitude of my heart. When I let Him change my heart, opportunities for ministry immediately increased. This dream changed my life, as should all messages from God.

Whenever you seek the interpretation of a dream or a vision, remember to be patient. It can sometimes take days or weeks to understand it. It is often the case that while pondering one dream, the dreamer or visionary will have yet another dream conveying the same message. The symbols and presentation of the new dream or vision may be completely different from the first one, as it was in the case of Pharaoh's second dream. But, as Joseph pointed out to Pharaoh, both dreams carried one and the same meaning. Our loving and faithful

heavenly Father will persist in getting His message through. Simply separate the symbols and ponder them individually until the fog begins to lift. Let God know you are taking Him seriously; work with it in small pieces until the light goes on in your head and you reach the rewards of the "AHA!" stage.

It may be helpful to have someone experienced with the interpretation process hear your dream or vision. An objective and sympathetic listener can ask questions which press your thoughts in valuable directions that your conscious mind may be resisting. However, if the person does not have the maturity to refrain from defining symbols or doing the interpreting for you, you would be better off to trust the Lord for guidance and ponder it by yourself.

Doubts? Questions? I am sure you have many. Let's look at some of the obvious ones: Are all dreams from God? From the broad perspective that God created us with the ability to dream, I would say yes. But do all dreams represent messages from God? While there are different opinions on this, I would have to say no. I believe that many dreams spring out of our own inner man, or psyche. But that does not mean they are not useful. Such dreams can give us insight into our true emotional state and are often used in counseling.

From this standpoint, I have found even my nightmares helpful at times. And while I cannot control the content of the dream, I do have some control over starting it and stopping it. I have awakened from a nightmare and made a conscious decision to go back into the dream and face the monster, only to discover that it was a part of me that needed to be dealt with. In any case, dreams are nothing to be afraid of.

The discussion of nightmares brings up another question: can Satan cause a dream? I don't think so. I know that there are those who disagree, but I base my opinion on a couple of observations. First, I can find no warning or account of it in the Scriptures. Second, from my own experience with dreams, I have never found one that I could accredit to Satan. I have even resolved some of the recurring nightmares I had as a child. What is the difference between a vision and a dream?

Simply that a dream occurs during sleep, while a vision is seen while your conscious mind is still awake. There is a "gray" area of drowsiness when one is dozing but not yet fully asleep. Images can come to us then, but I am not sure which category those experiences fall into. The result is the same, so maybe it doesn't matter.

The main point is that both dreams and visions represent a symbolic language God uses to communicate with us. We know that God uses this language because of its many occurrences in Scripture. With the help of a good concordance, you can do your own study on dreams using the Bible alone as your text. Studies have shown that over two-thirds of the books of the Bible has been influenced by either a dream or a vision.

There are at least five dreams and visions connected with the birth of Jesus:

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20).

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (Matthew 2:12)

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up, " he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. " (Matthew 2:13)

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt... (Matthew 2:19)

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in

Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee. (Matthew 2:22)

During this very critical and vulnerable time in the life of Jesus, Joseph's every step was directed by messages he received through dreams. But Joseph lived nearly two thousand years ago. Could it be possible that God would still use this language today? Yes, He does -- and we have this confirming prophesy from Joel 2:28, repeated by Peter in Acts:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your, sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

The New Testament is filled with accounts of God communicating with His people through dreams and visions. Peter received his commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles by means of a dream he had while praying on a rooftop (Acts 9:9-23). Through a vision, God sent Ananias to restore sight to Saul (who had been struck blind), then used a vision to tell Saul (Paul) that Ananias was coming to heal him (Acts: 10-19). As we can see, major events in the story of the early church were set in motion through dreams and visions.

If this language is so much a part of God's way of communicating to us, why aren't we taught lore about it today? How were we robbed of such a wonderful gift? For the answer, we need to go back into history at the teachings of two renowned philosophers, Plato and Socrates.

Plato seemed to be on a good track. He believed that we receive knowledge from three sources: 1) our five senses, 2) reasoning or intellect, and 3) our own spirit. Socrates, who came along later, threw out the idea of the spirit and taught that knowledge comes only from the first two sources, our senses and our intellect. That is how we are taught to function in the western world today. Modern Christians have adapted the practice of their beliefs to this limited concept: unwittingly following Greek philosophy rather than the clear revelation of Scripture.

Not only does Socrates' teaching deny our own spirit as a source of knowledge, it leads us to deny the Spirit of God as a Source of knowledge. If we are to function as the Bride of Christ, we must break out of this paradigm. God is Spirit, He created us with a spirit, and He calls us to worship Him "in spirit and in truth (John 4:24)."

It is surely evident by now that the subject of dreams and visions is worthy of an entire book of its own. Several are already written, one of which I particularly recommend to you. The author: Herman Riffel, was the main speaker at the first Christian conference I ever attended. The topic was dreams and visions. It was wonderfully enlightening to hear his insights, which have proved to be a continual blessing in my spiritual walk. His book on this subject was originally published in 1981 under the title, "Your Dreams: God's Neglected Gift." It is now in print as:

Dreams: Wisdom Within
by Herman Riffel
Destiny Image Publishers
P. O. Box 351
Shippensburg, PA 17257
ISBN 1-56043-007-9

Take courage as you pursue this language. It may seem difficult at times, but your persistence will be richly rewarded. Some of those around you may think this pursuit is silly, or worthless. Still others may try to warn you that it is not of God. Ask them to consider: how can something that is not from God be so central to the writings and the narratives of the Scriptures? As you seek to master this language, you will find at least two things happening: you will gain a better understanding of yourself, and you will certainly enjoy a deeper understanding of God.

THE SAFETY NET

What comes to your mind when you think about a safety net? Maybe the first thing you picture is a trapeze artist. Or perhaps a construction site. I remember the nets stretched around the perimeter of the flight deck on the aircraft carrier where I served in the Navy. These nets saved lives and offered protection from injury.

Safety nets are necessary because there will always be people who work dangerously close to the edge. However, many folks won't dare to venture there. They don't relish the idea of ever needing the net, so they simply attach themselves firmly to the central structure and stick there. However, many job assignments could never be completed if all of us were bound that tightly.

I remember an assignment on which I had to shoot video footage of a new building from the open door of a helicopter. When the helicopter arrived, I was glad to find that the pilot had brought the equipment I had requested: a belt with a single strap attached to it. The belt went around me, and the strap attached my belt to the helicopter frame. There were about three feet of slack in that strap - not enough to prevent me from falling, but enough to catch me if I did. It might have seemed risky, but I needed that open door and some freedom of movement to get the kind of shots I wanted for the video.

As we near the end of our survey, you are probably wondering how you can prevent any errors in hearing God. But lengthy instructions in "fool proofing" your spiritual ears would be beside the point, because the root problem behind

faulty hearing is really very simple. When we don't pursue knowing the heart and character of God as revealed through His Love Letters and sound scriptural teachings, our wrong motive leaves the door open for mistakes and confusion. We have already seen how attitudes of self-seeking, showing off, and grandstanding can be avoided when we truly seek His heart and apply ourselves to knowing Him. When our desire to pursue hearing the languages of God is fueled by a longing to know Him better, rather than by a need to promote ourselves higher within some religious organization, we will go far in preventing a fall.

What sort of failures are we talking about here? Do I mean sin? Yes. So often, our missed direction stems from impatience. There is no clear path when we insist on going ahead of the Holy Spirit. Abraham and Sarah did that and fathered an Ishmael! A tendency to listen to our flesh (and call it the Holy Spirit) reflects an uncrucified urge to bring about our own worldly desires. The consequences of such self-deception can range from simple embarrassment to downright devastation.

I know what some of you are thinking (because I'm a klutz too). You couldn't bear to make a mistake that would mess up God's plans. But let me ask you: are you really conceited enough to think that some action of yours can foul up God's plans? My God is bigger than that. I am living proof that He can take care of the biggest mistakes. Romans 8:28 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Sometimes that "good" is to humble me!

However, the pursuit of a deep knowledge of God requires spiritual courage. The desire to hear His voice does often call you to the edge. What if you make a wrong step? What then?

Fall into the safety net. This net is made of strong cords that are carefully knotted and woven together. Its strength never fails, yet it will never mark you nor condemn you. These

pure white cords are made of grace. Yes, grace. That may seem too simple for you, but the writer of that beloved hymn "Amazing Grace" understood this concept well. Here is the third verse:

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have
already come;
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far, And grace
will lead me home.

Yes, there will be "dangers, toils and snares."
It has become popular to say, "I want to be on the cutting edge of what God is doing." But do you really understand the significance of that symbol? If you spend much time around the cutting edge of a sword or knife, you will find it is a dangerous place to be! The edge of anything, whether it be a cliff or building, is simply a risky place to hang out. Most of us, by nature, tend to avoid the edges. Very few of us understand edges the way an eagle building a nest understands edges.

*... like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its
young ...
(Deuteronomy 32:11a)*

I did not fully understand this Scripture until I gained a better understanding of eagles. The particular species that lives in the mountainous areas will build its nest on a high, craggy cliff which allows a vertical drop of hundreds of feet without any obstruction. The nest itself is well constructed of small branches and sticks interwoven to create a strong foundation. Prickly vines are used to hold everything in place. The nest is then lined with leaves, feathers, and straw to make a soft bed for the young.

The young eagles are protected and fed in this nest until their mother senses they are developed enough to go out on their own. When this time has arrived, she flies to within a few feet of the nest - in full view of the eaglets - and hovers, moving her powerful wings to hold her position. After this demonstration of wing power, she lands on the nest and begins to toss out the leaves, feathers, and straw. It doesn't take long for the tender bodies of these young eagles to become aware that things

have changed. They grow more and more uncomfortable and begin to move around the nest looking for a soft spot to sit.

The mother then takes one youngster at a time and pushes it to the edge of the nest and out over the cliff. This once very comfortable little fellow finds himself in the middle of a terrifying fall. The face of the cliff flashes by faster and faster as he tumbles toward the rocks below.

Now, none of these young eagles ever fly on this first trip down the mountain. Within seconds of his doom, the mother eagle - with great skill and accuracy - swoops under the falling eaglet and catches him on her powerful wing. She gives him a free lift back up to the nest - only to begin the process all over again.

Let's look at the conclusion of verse 11:

... like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. (Deuteronomy 32:11)

Have you ever felt you had been pushed over the edge? Were you certain you were about to crash and burn? Ah, but somehow you were snatched from your doom at the last minute, right? I have heard many testimonies like that. This is nothing other than God's amazing grace. That grace is His divine safety net under girding our fragile lives.

SOARING

*Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
(Isaiah 40:30-31)*

At the point when we have been pushed out of the nest often enough, we will begin to use our wings and learn to fly. It takes a lot of effort at first. But as the young eagle matures and becomes familiar with wind currents, he stops using his own strength and begins to soar. Soaring requires that the eagle become sensitive to changes in the wind. He must depend on the wind's power to carry him to great heights without having to expend his own energy flapping his wings.

Sometimes these winds seem to carry the eagle in the wrong direction. But this amazing creature learns to be patient, to trust in the wind to accomplish its purpose.

In the Scripture at the beginning of this chapter, the King James Version uses the word "wait" in place of "hope." Eagles are known to perch themselves on a rock for hours waiting for the right current to come along so they can launch into it. These eagles have to hear what the wind is "saying." It is interesting to note that the Old Testament Hebrew word for "wind" (ruwach) and the New Testament Greek word for "wind" (pneuma) are the same words used for "spirit" in the Scriptures.

In our western culture, we have learned to seek instant gratification. At work, we push ourselves to accomplish all that we can in the shortest space of time possible. We choose a lifestyle of sweat, pounding our way across life's lakes in a row-boat rather than allow the wind to pull us along in a sailboat. Most of us have brought this stressful way of thinking with us into our new life as Christians.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing - if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?
(Galatians 3 :1-5)

Are you like this foolish Galatian church? We all began with the Holy Spirit, who led us to our salvation through Jesus. Are we now reverting back to our old ways, trying to reach the goal of our Christian life and service to our King by our own effort? Are we also this foolish?

When I talk to people about this life of dependence on the voice of the Holy Spirit for direction, the response is often, "Sounds like a cop-out to me," or, "Looks like the easy way out," or "How wonderful it would be if it were true!" I have news for them: a cop-out this walk is not! It requires a great deal of effort, humility, self-denial, and obedience to be attentive to the voice of God. This is far from being the easy route. But considering the rewards of a closer, personal, and more intimate relationship with God, I have found it well worth the cost.

I have written this book to encourage you to discipline yourself to listen for the languages of God. Through this discipline you will find yourself growing in your own personal relationship

with Him. The success that awaits you in discerning the languages of God is His gift to you, not some talent with which you may impress your fellow believers regarding your level of spirituality. Our culture teaches us to measure our achievements. We bring this habit with us into the Christian realm; we naturally compare our spiritual progress to that of others in order to see where we rank in importance. We are driven to know if we have "arrived" yet.

"I don't hear God the way you do" is a statement that I hear from time to time. It always gives me a few minutes of discomfort. It is a blessing when we have time to discuss how they hear God. Usually I end up telling them, "I don't hear from God the way **you** do!" Our loving Heavenly Father has made each one of us unique individuals, and He treats us that way.

There are a number of wrong approaches, which seem to keep God's people flapping instead of soaring. Most likely there are some that have escaped my notice, but I would like to address some of the obvious ones here in this chapter. The following Scripture from Philippians seems to touch upon each of them:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. (Philippians 3:12-16)

First of all, we seem to worry about reaching some sort of perfection before we can be called into service or walk intimately with God. The Apostle Paul is telling the Philippians that he had not attained all that he taught nor had he yet been made perfect. Still he encourages them to press on. You can

accomplish much during your training and testing. It seems that while in this body we will be constantly approaching perfection and never quite arriving!

Some of us allow our past to haunt us. Paul speaks of forgetting what is behind. This Scripture is most often used to encourage those under self-condemnation to receive freedom from past sins and failings. But I believe that Paul is also talking about our past successes and comfortable experiences. Many of us have a tendency to cling to the past - whether good or bad. I call it "tree hugging". If you cling to the tree you will not be carried by the wind of the Spirit.

Fear of error is another area that can freeze us in our tracks. At the end of this passage Paul says that if we find ourselves thinking differently from other believers in some area, God will clear it up for us. What a wonderful promise from our God Who loves us so much!

Recently a friend expressed to me that she was worried about where she was in this walk in the Spirit. I told her that she wouldn't know when she had "arrived," because it would probably coincide with the point in time when it didn't matter to her anymore. What matters, dear friends' and sojourners, is the Lord and the love you share with Him. Let us face into His wind, spread our wings, and let the current of His perfect will carry us where we are to go.

MINISTRY NOTICE

Les Carroll ministers to the whole Body of Christ. His ministry is one of encouragement, exhortation. He is available for church services, conferences, retreats, and home meetings.

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