

Growing in Faith
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When we come together to worship God, what an awesome privilege to be carried into His Presence! It is a beautiful experience! We sing and dance and clap our way in. I love that! We dance and clap our way in, but when we get there in the Holiest Place, we must not dismiss God's presence by clapping in His face. We worship Him: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." We allow the Holy Spirit within to enable us to worship. We understand the reverent silence before Him, embracing His presence. I believe God is bringing the church to new dimensions of maturity and we are learning better *how* to worship Him. Not that He just wants to be worshipped, but we are literally learning *how*. I appreciate the sensitivity of anointed leaders as they know when to bring us back to our surroundings to be able to feast in His Word. That is necessary because when we worship, we are being prepared to receive *from* Him. First we give to Him an offering, and then we receive from Him our spiritual food.

We have looked at **FAITH** from several aspects in the previous messages ("An Introduction to Faith" and "Foundations of Faith"). ***First, we REDEFINED faith*** by seeing it simply as "reliance on the word of another." So for us Christians, it's *learning to trust what the Lord says*. If God said it, God will do what He said. Do you believe that? Then consider what promise, or promises, you are holding in the back of your mind, or spirit, or maybe literally in the back of your Bible. The ones that have yet to be fulfilled in your life.

There are times the Lord makes a promise, prophetically perhaps, and it isn't fulfilled immediately. In that event, we tend to become discouraged. We talk to other believers about this "word," and at first, everyone believes it right along with us. "Oh, that's God! I witness to that. For certain, that's God." And then 3 months go by or maybe, oh dreadful thought, 3 years, and there still is no fulfillment of the word as it came to you. Doubt sets in and the same people, who once voiced confident agreement, now question: "Are you sure that was God? Maybe you did something to nullify it."

If **God** said it, God will do it! Now, if someone else said it, or if you just thought it, you have reason to doubt. But if you know that you know that you know you heard it from God, if God said it, God *will* perform it. He doesn't waste your time and He never gives you false hope. When God says something specific and confirms it to you, it's because He plans to fulfill what He has said. So simply stated, *faith* is total reliance on the word of another.

In a previous message, we delineated a number of things that can limit or diminish our faith ("Foundations of Faith"). In that list we addressed the "fear of the Lord." I think one of the reasons that the world doesn't *fear God* is because **we** don't fear Him! One of the reasons the world doesn't *believe* the Word of God is because the Bride doesn't. Oh, we believe selected bits and pieces and parts that we've *experienced*, but anything yet to be experienced which has been promised to us, we're a little shaky on whether or not we believe that. But we're changing, aren't we? We are learning and growing. "From glory to glory, the Lord is changing us" (2Cor.3:18).

I believe, through this present revelation, we are making tremendous advances toward getting to know our God. Don't you love Him all the more for knowing Him more completely? His Word becomes not just the Holy Writ of God, but a personal love letter. Every word you read can speak personally and intimately to you. There's a true miracle there – that every one of us receives exactly what we need from Him – all reading the same words.

Secondly, we discovered how often faith is literally RESISTED. Every time the Lord speaks, He couples what He says with sufficient faith for an individual to act on what is spoken. Jesus walked up to the sick man and said, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk" (Jn.5:8). It didn't matter to Him that the man had been lying on his sick-bed for 38 years. Jesus was unaffected by the dire statistics. He simply spoke, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk."

Now, let's suppose the man answered Jesus like you or I might respond: "Tomorrow, I will. Tomorrow, I'm going to take up my bed, Lord. And tomorrow, Lord, I'm going to walk." The next day, the supernatural faith present to act on what the Lord commanded would not be present, and the crucial moment to act in obedience would be lost. That explains why sometimes, when we are in a service and the Lord speaks personally and intimately to us, we feel the compulsion of the Holy Spirit to move forward *right then*, for it is the anointed time, the appointed moment. There is a time, the /kairos/ moment, to come out from hiding among the trees because the Lord is there activating His faith for you in that moment. ***Obedience is coupled with faith and it is the faith of God that stirred your own faith.*** When the Word is being spoken, at the time the Word of the Lord comes forth, it comes forth *with God's faith attached* to it.

There's the faith **of** God, faith **in** God, and faith **through** God.

The faith of God is His faith. He gives it, or lends it, or applies it to us for a purpose. We don't live in His faith all the time. Wouldn't you love to live in that dynamic, supernatural realm of, "I believe – I believe" based on God's faith? That would be exciting – to live there day after day. I would love to be able to live there. But at this point, He says, "Faith is given to you, a measure, a seed (see Rom.12:3b). You must learn what to do with it. And from time to time, when I come on the scene, because I plan to move you from one place to another – from one level to another – from one dimension to another – from one understanding of truth to another – when I plan to move you, I will bring My faith unto you, and it, **My faith** will stir, ignite, move, and delight your own faith so that when you act upon My Word, it is actually your faith that is at work."

How many times God has given us the measure of His faith – how often the Lord has given us His faith – and the Holy Spirit has breathed His certainty upon us that says, "You can do it. Yes, *you* can do it," but we resisted Him totally. If we hadn't resisted the stirring of His faith on ours, we would have risen to the next level of understanding, we would have stepped up to a higher level of living. Hallelujah! We have choices to make at every turn.

Thirdly, we looked at our tendency to REDUCE what God freely gives. The number one method of reducing faith is through our *disobedience to God's Word*. We like to get together and sing "I believe God, I believe God. Ask what you will and it shall be done." We like to get all revved up with the words to that old chorus, singing, "I believe, I believe God." But what we glide over are the words in the middle that tell us *how*: "Trust and obey. Believe God and say – I believe, I believe God!" I am not certain whether it is fortunate or unfortunate that God takes us at our spoken (sung) words. ☺ "Alright, My child, I heard that. So, here's what I want from you." But when we hear Him giving directions, we resist and offer a compromise: "Lord, I can't do that. However, I do have an alternate plan for You. I can do this much of it and so-and-so can do the rest." We are great at appointing substitutes.

So, in those previous messages, we redefined faith, resisted it, and reduced it. Now we will look at another aspect or dimension of FAITH. ***Fourthly, we are learning that faith can REACH.*** Because of the *past extreme teachings on faith*, many Christians have been confused about the biblical truth. They have not yet discovered the *difference between presumption and faith*. Here is a statement we need to consider and remember: **Every time you move in presumption and call it faith, it is absolutely necessary that you fall – or you will never learn the difference between the two.**

We hate that. The lesson is so difficult. No one I know of ever asked for a spanking. It hurts very much when you think you've heard from God – you've gotten hold of a little piece of truth here and little piece of truth there – but you put it all together *presumptuously*. The thoughts sort of progress like this: "All I have to do is decide what God's going to do and then declare it and it will be so." And so we do just that – decide what God's going to do, and indeed, we're bold enough these days, to tell Him what to do. Hello?

Too often, I hear people say, “I told the Lord...” Oh, my Friend, if you told Him like that, He isn’t Lord! If we are ordering Him around, who is the lord? Jesus is Lord when we follow His directives with our obedience. He is Lord when our attitude reflects Paul’s – “I don’t know what to pray for until the Holy Spirit tells me (see Rom.8:26). I don’t even know what to think until the Holy Spirit tells me.” What do you think Paul meant when he declared, “I pray with the Spirit and I pray with the understanding?” (1Cor.14:15). Submitting to His lordship is when the Lord says, “This is what I want you to ask for from Me,” and we do that.

Oh, church, this whole misunderstanding must be reversed. We need to get back to the place where we are the servants and the Lord is Lord. We’ve been “the lord” trying to make Him be the servant. Here’s the problem with that – no one has ever worshipped a servant. If we see Him only as a servant, we will not worship. In a church where the people order the Lord around (in the name of Jesus) to do this and this and this, you will *not* find *worship*. You’ll find a group of people who feel very proud of their authority with God: “I told the Lord to do this,” and “we required that,” and “we demanded Him to calm the storm. Hey! The storm calmed!” Jesus said, “My Father seeketh worshippers who will worship Him. Father is looking for those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (Jn.4:23,24).

We must catch the vision of Him like Isaiah saw in chapter 6 – “high and lifted up.” Then we will fall down at His feet and worship Him. There’s such hallowedness in that! When we are awed by His Presence, we won’t know what else to do. “What do we do now?” The only response to that question can be: “Keep worshipping Him and when He dismisses you, you may go.” When individuals reach a peak of all they can handle, He will know that. He is Lord and it’s His faith that comes forth to stir ours. He stays just long enough for us to be able, or enabled by His Spirit, to do what He says. If we don’t follow His lead, the spoon is taken back and our faith will subside.

There is another extreme – when we do nothing with our faith; when we just like the feeling of being stirred but unchanged. I don’t want to be stirred up any more without surrendering to His lordship. I don’t want merely to be stirred, do you? I want to be *stirred but also changed*. Every time He comes, I want it to make a difference in my life. I want to be more like Him after He stirs me. I don’t want to simply be on the floor or on my face and get up the same as when I hit my knees!

The opposite of that is when we move presumptuously. The extreme position of hyper-faith is when we exercise ourselves in things too high for us. Ps. 131 says, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, my eyes are not lifted to loftiness, I have not exercised in things too great for me.” Now listen with your hearts – I want each one of us to have the kind of faith that moves mountains. I long for that. But you see, we have erroneously taught the Body of Christ that every level of maturity operates in that ultimate level of faith. And Church, it just isn’t true.

One of the reasons we believe it’s true is because when you’re a baby Christian, the Lord honors any move toward Him that’s in faith. When you’re a baby in the Lord and you’re driving along for a parking place, you glibly pray, “Lord, I need a parking place.” And right where and when you need it, a car moves out of its place – “Thank You, Lord.” Do you remember that? You considered it, “Great faith.” The Lord called it “infancy.” Then one day you drove along and said, “Lord, I need a parking place,” and He said, “Go find one.” “Uh, wait a minute. That doesn’t fit the picture at all! I’m a woman of faith!” Is the point made?

A classic illustration from my own personal background fits here: When my son was 4 years of age, we had the greatest battle we ever had. We were going out in the car and I had forgotten something in the house, so I returned to get it. When I came back outside, Dan had locked the driver’s side of the car and was sitting behind the steering wheel. He said, “I will drive.” It was so cute, you know, at four. I calmly said, “Honey, open the door.” But in all sincerity, he declared, “Dan will drive.” After about the third time, I demanded, “Open the door or I’ll kill you!” in my most maternal tone. ☺ When I finally got inside the car and rewarded him openly, it was then that I realized the pained expression on his face was

not because of his “reward.” He was devastated because I did not trust him with some 350 horses. After all, he had been watching me drive for four years! Little Dan was confident he knew how it was done.

Oh, we think we can just study it. “I watched how they do it. Boy, I know how to do it! They said it like this, and then you throw that little, ‘in the name of Jesus’ in there, and then it’s all done.” So we say the right words and try to make them work. And when we’re tiny babies, the Lord says, “Give them anything. What they need is to learn to trust.”

So, everything we prayed for we received when we were little babies. Everything. We prayed for the sick and they recovered. If we dared to pray for the dead, they would have risen – I’m just sure of that! It was wonderful! Very faith building. Oh, the wisdom of God! Then as we started growing up, the Lord said, “Let’s talk about the lessons of life. We need to gain some understanding. Why don’t you get to know Me?” “Lord, I don’t need to know any more than I know right now. Oh, this is wonderful! Be done. Be done. Be done in the name of Jesus.”

It’s easy to get your storms calmed when you’re an infant. Everyone knows what we often do for infants is – to change them. Someone else cleans up after their messes. But the day finally dawns when you complain, “I need a change, Lord. I want out of this mess.” And His parental response is, “Well then, clean it up!” This is not a popular perspective, but it is true.

“Why Lord?” He says, “Because I will entrust great things to a people who know Me. I bestow more privilege and responsibility as our relationship matures. I’m going to give power and authority to my followers (see Lk.10:19); and they shall speak to mountains and see them removed (Mk.11:23). They shall heal the sick (Mk.16:18); they shall be lights (Mt.5:14) and witnesses (Ac.1:8). The whole world will come to them for their great knowledge and riches, but I cannot entrust all of that to 4-year-olds.”

And then there was my day when I said, “Lord, I want more power, and Your Word says if I ask the Father anything in the name of Jesus, He’ll give it to me (Jn.14:13,14; 16:23,24). So, Father, in the name of Jesus, I’m asking for an increase of power.” I saw my prayer going right up into heaven like an arrow and Jesus said, “Father,” almost apologetically, “Father, Iverna is asking for power, and I told her if she asked for anything in My name, You’d do it.” The Father smiled in that omnipotent, omniscient way, and said, “Petition granted – but put a hold on it while we get her ready.” ☺

That’s what is happening to some of you. “I don’t know why I’ve been going through what I’ve been going through...” You’re getting ready. The Lord is about to answer your prayer. Is that good news? Let me put it another way. *That is* good news! Hallelujah! He’s getting you ready, but first, you’ll get into a little trouble. Interesting, that when you are first filled with the Holy Spirit, the first words you think you get from the Lord are correction for your pastor. ☺ “Pastor, I just feel the Lord shared something with me that will make a tremendous change in this church.” We begin this walk with such great zeal but lack the wisdom and knowledge of God that greater maturity brings. We truly need to get to know Him so we can grow up into the men and women of God for whom He is looking.

What then, *are* we supposed to do with faith if we’re not to take what we believe and *make it* operate or produce? We’re supposed to begin right where we are, at home and in ourselves. If your faith cannot work in you and for you, don’t try to exercise it outside. If you can’t get your own life in order... don’t try to export your mess to someone else.

The day is soon coming when the Holy Spirit, who is the searchlight of God, will be searching out homes, individuals, families, pastimes, bookkeeping practices, our honesty with the government, and much more on a personal level. He is coming down into your life, Sir, to see if you love that woman like Christ loved the church (Eph.5:25). He’s coming down in your life, Sis, to see if you’ve chosen, if you’ve brought yourself into submission to the authority He set over you (Eph.5:22). He’s coming young people, to see if there is honor and respect for father and mother (Eph.6:1,2). “Well, if you knew my mother and dad, you wouldn’t say ‘honor and respect them.’”

Listen, for this will set you free. There is nothing in the Bible that's hypocritical or encourages deceit. Nothing. Not a single verse. There's nothing in the Bible that teaches you to be a liar or pretend that something is so if it is not. Some young people have been terribly mistreated by fathers and by mothers. When they read that verse, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long on the earth" (Ex.20:12), they think, "There's no way! I can't." The Bible says you're not to hate them, you're to love them. "How do I do that? Under my circumstances, tell me *how!*" God always has a way that we can rise above our most difficult situations. It's by forgiving them. Impossible?

It is possible under the grace and inspiration and power of God. Forgiveness does not mean you lie about everything and say, "They were wonderful parents." Oh, no. It helps if we have an understanding of what God means by the word. Honor means "put a price on them. Set a value." "Well, I don't know what possible value I could set." Let me give it to you: because of them, you can enter into eternal life. Had you not been born, you could never have been born-again. Hallelujah! Set a value on that. So, we can at least say, "Alright, thank God for them bringing me into this world." At least that much is for real.

The Holy Spirit is coming into homes and individual lives saying, "Exercise your faith at your own living levels." As we study God's Word, we get to know Him and learn that He has a way of living that is higher than the way we live in our own natural strength. Look at Paul's words. He said, "I move on by forgetting what's behind" (Phil.3:13). Now, Paul often spoke in nautical terms as he was well-acquainted with the sea. Every time he was driven out of one country, he boarded a boat and went to another place. He knew about boats. In this passage, if Paul was speaking in nautical terms, what he meant by, "forgetting those things which are behind," could be interpreted this way: "pulling up the anchor of the past."

Some of us have been going around in circles, just drifting along because we have an anchor buried down in the muck of the past. We have convinced ourselves we could never go very far because of inherited traits, or things that have been done to us, or because of wrong choices we made in earlier years, or because of anything negative. There's an anchor down there and we don't go anywhere because when the winds blow, we're stuck in the past and tossed about almost at random. And Paul says, "I choose to pull up the anchor! I am moving on." Hallelujah!

Can you say, "I'm sick of this whole cycle? I'm pulling the anchor up off of this old thing. I'm about to get on with God's program." He will not force an anchor loose and He won't force you to make a right decision, but He will lend His faith to stir you to the place where, like Paul, you can say, "forgetting those old things, I pull up that anchor." He will help you to say, "Blow, O winds," and when they come they will blow in the right direction. And that action is always followed by either obedience or disobedience – period.

Paul continues: "I reach out and press forward." That's his way of saying, in nautical terms, "Let the winds blow. Let the north winds blow, those cold chilling trials. If they must be here to get me from this point to the next destination, let them blow. And let the warm south winds come. Let them blow this boat to the place where I need to go." This demands an uplifting of the mind and an action of the will.

An important aspect of maturity is the discovery of that portion which belongs only to God and that which belongs only to us. Our part and His part. Then bringing the two parts together as co-workers appropriating truth.

How does faith reach? In 1 Kings 17, there is a story about Elijah. I love Elijah. He is a wonderful man. He was so strong, so stalwart, so full of faith and power. We know little of his background – it just says "Elijah the Tishbite." He comes on the scene with no introduction and suddenly starts speaking in the name of the Lord. No one knows what preparation took place in Elijah. The Bible is silent about it. He was the kind of man that went before a king and said, "King, you've been wicked in the sight of God and this is what God says to Israel. 'It's not going to rain for awhile and you're going to have trouble in

your land.’ It’s been real nice talking to you, King. Good bye.” And Elijah would simply depart while the king was standing there reeling, “Who? What? Where? Why, why some kook came in here!” He may have seemed a little strange to that king until it didn’t rain one year, then two years. The third year, the king says, “Somebody find that nutty prophet. I want to kill him.” ☺ It’s a little different in your King James Bible.

Meanwhile back at the brook, Elijah has had a little vacation. Oh, this is great! Oh, I just love the little brook. I can almost hear the conversation with Elijah: “Brook. Brook. Where’s the little brook?” “It dried up, Elijah.” “Why did it dry up?” And then we have the ravens. “Where’s the food? They’re late today. This is the first time they’ve ever been late.” No ravens, no brook. You’d better look for sin in your life, Elijah! - - - Sounds like what we might hear in the church today when things cease producing as they had been.

God says, “You’ve had a three-year vacation, now get up. I’m going to move you on.” “What king this time, Lord?” “No king, Elijah. I want you to go to this little widow down the way. She’s had a few problems. Things have been tough because of no rain, you know, and I want you to go down there and ask her feed you.” “Oh, thanks, that’s wonderful. She’ll just love that. ☺ And wait until the word gets out: ‘Man of God went to a poor widow and asked her to feed him.’” ☺ Might that have been our response to such instruction? We don’t actually have the nerve to say so, and perhaps that’s wisdom on our part, but often our actions prove that our answer to God’s direction is, “Lord, that would be so unreasonable!”

“Go and find the woman.” Elijah gets up. I mean, what option does he have? ☺ There is no brook and no raven. Isn’t that interesting how the Lord sets the circumstances just so? Squeezed, pressed in, the enemy is coming behind, water ahead, and mountain on both sides. We’re not much different from the Israelites when they were leaving Egypt (see Ex.12:37-14:10).

God asks Elijah, “What are you saying to Me?” “I believe, Lord.” “I thought you might see it My way.” So, Elijah finds the little widow. She’s out gathering a few sticks to make a fire. He says, “Hello there, Ma’am.” She recognizes him. “Oh, how good! The man of God. He’s come to bless me, I’m sure.” Then Elijah makes his request: “Could you get me a drink of water?” “Certainly, Sir.” And she starts off to get the water but he adds, “While you’re at it, make me a little cake.” It’s at this point, she turns around. “Let me explain to you the condition I’m in. I have just enough meal and oil to make two little cakes, biscuits, one for my son and one for myself. And then we shall sit down and die together.”

Here’s a side sermon – many churches are in the same condition. It’s been so long since they’ve had any fresh corn and wine from Zion. They baked their last biscuit seventeen years ago and have been sitting there trying to succumb ever since. But that’s not the message we’re going to discover here.

The widow says to Elijah, “I’m about ready to die. I’m going to do this last thing.” And he says, “Go ahead with your plans – except for one itsy bitsy little thing. Before you make the cakes for you and your son, make one for me.” Be honest. We wonder: “Elijah! Are you some sort of selfish egomaniac?”

Sadly, the truth is, from time to time, we have a similar concept of God. We question if He isn’t some egomaniac sitting on a throne demanding, “Praise Me! Worship Me!” Why does the Lord require our praises? “Praise Me. I’m looking for *worshippers* who will praise Me.” The answer to that question is, “Because in our praise and adoration, *He can change us*. In praising Him, our channels of faith and trust and love are open through which He can fully minister to us, grow us up, mature us.”

Elijah is a *type of Christ*. The spirit of Elijah is there to show us that when we give the *first fruits* to the Lord, we open the channel of love and faith through which He can bless us with an abundance, exceedingly beyond anything we ever believed for (Eph.3:20). “The first fruits. You mean we’re to pay our tithe? I pay my 10 percent.” If your attitude is that you pay your 10 percent, I feel sorry for you because you’re caught up in *legalism*. When we give at least 10 percent, and then freely give offerings

above that, we have learned the *secret to prosperity*. The true secret to prosperity, spiritually, physically, financially, materially, in every way is – **flow**. We are to be conduits for everything God brings to us allowing His grace to flow through us.

If you want the blessings of God to stop in your life, I can tell you how to stop it. Clog up the pipes. Bring it all unto yourself and internalize it. The source will be cut off because God's intention is flow – flow – flow. He blesses you – you give it away by blessing another – He gives you a return 10-fold – you give that – He gives you back 100-fold. And there you are with all the substance. “What am I supposed to...? Where?” “Over here.” “Oh, okay.” You give to others and He gives it back. Pretty soon you're getting what the world and the church call “richer.” You have more than anyone else. Wealth is not always counted in terms of dollars. But you keep giving what you have – and giving and giving and giving – and you get richer and richer and no one understands it.

And then, by contrast, there's a greedy little person here, a Christian, and everything they receive they save for another time. They tuck it away in a safe place. Did you ever get a prophetic word from the Lord, an insight, a revelation, and write it down to save it for a special day when you're “called upon” in the assembly? What you received will be dead by the time you use it – it will stink. It really will. You'll pull it out some day and say, “Some time ago, the Lord was showing me...”

Elijah tells the widow, “Oh, *first...*” First – not what's left over. We're not to do everything else and then hope we have enough left over to give. It's the principle of first fruits unto God. Now what does this demand from this lady? Of course, obedience – and the **reaching of her faith**. What does she have faith for right now? To die. A lot of Christians have more faith to die than they do to live. Their favorite songs are, “It will be worth it all and some day He'll make it plain to me.” They have faith to survive for a period then die and go to heaven.

The Lord says, “I have come that you might have life and that more abundantly (Jn.10:10b). I have come that you might live. ‘If the same Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He shall quicken your mortal bodies’ (Rom.8:11). I'm looking for a church that will live. I'm going to have a life-flowing church. I will have a church filled with worshippers. I'll have a church that can handle the blessings of God. I'm going to give and give and give and give and when I pour out My blessings upon My people, it will not come as rains that cause floods.” Hear that! When does the flood come? When there are not enough outlets to handle the rain.

So, the widow says, “Well, my faith has to reach. This is the man of God.” This is a definite word she embraces, and she makes the cake for Elijah – first. As far as she knows, she just used the last meal and oil she will ever have. I don't know how many will understand this, but I preach that way. As far as I know, I'm telling you everything I know right now. This is it. It's all I have. It's the best I have. I just let it flow as it comes. I'm giving you all I have right now, not knowing what tomorrow will bring. Am I communicating? I am pouring as He allows it to be poured. I don't know anything else. This is what He gave. But **my faith reaches** beyond that to what I don't know. I trust Him to feed you again tomorrow. The little widow doesn't know what lies ahead of her obedience. She doesn't know. She just heard the word, “Do what I told you.”

I grew up in a parsonage. My Daddy was my pastor. I was the only girl – two boys older, two boys younger. Things were very tough in my growing up years. My father's call in the ministry was to pioneer churches. He would go into a new city where there was no Full Gospel church. Today we would call it Charismatic or Pentecostal. Daddy would go to a poor part of town and out of his own pocket he would rent a building and start preaching the Word of God. People would come and about the time we had a house decent enough so I wasn't embarrassed to have people over, my Dad would have what we called “the mortgage burning service.” I thought all churches had them because we always did. As soon as we burned the mortgage of the church, Dad moved on to the next pioneer work in a new city. We moved into another dump and started over, ministering and cleaning and painting again. That's how I grew up. That was my Dad's commitment.

I was known for bringing home “strays.” When I would bring people home for dinner, sometimes one of my brothers would say, “We only have enough for us.” And my precious mother would always respond, “Don’t forget the little pot of oil.” We fed many families because I was a very generous person. I’d invite the whole family. “Come on over. Mother has plenty.” Mother would add salt and pepper and water – and prayer! We would set the table for everyone and everyone would eat. I grew up with that. I know God’s provision is more than enough. Do you?

Mark chapter 8, verse 22 – “Jesus came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Jesus, and besought Him to touch him. And Jesus took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town.” Historically, Jesus had performed no small amount of miracles in and near Bethsaida. Matthew and Luke document a specific time when Jesus, in essence, pronounced a curse (“Woe to you...”) on the cities, including Bethsaida, that rejected Him and His mighty works (Mt.11:20ff; Lk.10:13). It was His great sorrow to deal with them in such a manner, but their lack of repentance for unbelief brought this declaration on themselves. “Because of your sin and unbelief, I’m not going to do anything more among you.”

Jesus never violates what He says. They bring a blind man to Him in Bethsaida, for healing and He is about to perform a miracle, so He must take the man outside of the town. The spiritual reason for such an action is – often, the Lord must remove us from the people who bring us to the Lord so He can do something above *their* faith levels.

“Jesus took the man by the hand and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes...” There are two reasons for this – the literal one was that it was a common practice of physicians in that day. It was their way of pronouncing a curse on the *disease*. Someone would be brought to them with a disease, and the physician, in his colloquial way of saying, “I’m going to curse this,” would spit and he would pronounce a curse. “I curse that disease.” And then he would set about with herbs and so on to bring about healing.

So, Jesus acts now as a physician and He spits. That’s the literal understanding. But the spiritual is more exciting to me! Do you remember in Revelation 3:15 – John says “so then because thou art neither hot nor cold... I will spew thee out of My mouth?” When I was a little girl, preachers would almost dangle us over hell with that verse. It never made sense to me because it seemed to me that lukewarm was a little better than cold. Do you ever question those things in the Word? Of course, for that is the way we gain understanding. But for years, I never could understand the verse. I just accepted it.

One day, I said, “Lord, why is it that the lukewarm are the ones you spew out?” In the world, there are all three positions taken by people. There are those who are cold, or basically dead to the things of God, others are hot or on fire for God, and the lukewarm. Only two are hearing from God. The cold are those who do not know Jesus Christ at all. They certainly have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. These people don’t understand it fully but they are hearing from Him. No matter what I think I am saying, these are hearing Him say “Come unto Me. I died for you. I want to live in your life. I love you. I love you with an everlasting love. I will never leave you. Will you come to Me?” He is not spewing them out of His mouth.

Those who are on fire for God? Every one of you is getting what you personally need as you hear this message. As many people who hear or read, that many personalized sermons are going out. God knows exactly what you need at this juncture.

But there is another category of individuals. Those are ones who have met Jesus as Savior, and *maybe* even Baptizer in the Spirit. At some specific time of their lives, however, they made a decision: “This is it. I now have it all.” They are totally satisfied with where they are. They are not going any place higher with God. They don’t intend to until they die. Then, they are going to heaven – and they are right

because hell won't have them! ☺ That's true. Hell won't have anyone who is covered with the Blood of Jesus!

They don't hear anything, because they were spewed out of His mouth. Anything a preacher says, they say, "I've known that. I heard that before. Why doesn't he tell us something that we don't already know?" That's the bad news. Here's the good – it only takes one to hear. The good news is – here's how you get back in the mouth of God. Get hot or cold. Either admit you are totally backslidden and once again you'll hear Him say, "I died for you, come back home," or get on fire for God and become a part of the revelation of His Holy Word.

The man is there, and he's in a blind condition. He needs to experience the mouth of God. But is that the point? Read on. "And when He put His hands upon him..." – "He touched me!" Have you felt the touch of the Lord? Oh Hallelujah! I tell you, there is nothing like it in the entire world! There is nothing like knowing that He has touched you!

When Jesus put His hands on the blind man, He inquired, "Do you see anything?" Now, if this was today, there are some of us that would program this man. He would be prompted: "Now look. We're going to bring you to Jesus and ask Him to touch you. When He does, whether or not you actually can see at that moment, you are to *say* you can see. Okay? Let's hear you say you can see." "I can see." "Say it again." We mistakenly do this because we *believe* that by our speaking confidently a thing will be accomplished.

Here's the balance. There *are* times when the Lord speaks a word of faith to you, and you are confident in His touch. It happens *before* the physical evidence reveals that you know it's done. There *are* those great times of faith. But it isn't by our saying a thing is done that it is done. Oh, the games we play!

When Jesus touched the crippled, they leaped and danced. When He touched the blind, they saw. When He touched the deaf, they heard. (Mt.11:5; Lk.7:22; Mt.21:14) When the little lady with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment, the issue of blood ceased and she stood up straight and tall healed by the touch of Jesus (Mt.9:20-22).

Jesus talked to the blind man, "Can you see anything?" This is a moment of truth because what the man sees is very straight. He looked up and said, "I see men as trees walking." We would never let him say that today. "What? What you really mean is you're seeing. Aren't you seeing?" "I see. I see." "That's all I want to hear, I don't want to hear the rest." Jesus says, "I want to hear him. What did you say?" "Lord, what I see is men. They are like trees walking."

When I began to study this passage, I asked, "Lord, I know there is a spiritual significance to this." I always have to find that, don't you? You can learn to ask a lot of questions. The author lives in you, in case you forgot. ☺ So, I said, "What did You mean by that? 'Men as trees walking.' What would that be?" And He answered, "Well, if you saw men as trees walking, they'd be *rootless and fruitless*." "Right, Lord. I've seen them." May we never *be* them.

There are many people who, spiritually, are half blind because they've only seen men as trees walking. No roots. They don't see the foundation in Christ – "on Christ the solid rock" – they don't see that. There is no security, no certainty, no fruit. We're supposed to produce fruit (Jn.15). What for? What are we supposed to do with that fruit? – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness, meekness, temperance, faith (Gal.5:22,23). What are we supposed to do with it? Wear it? Who gets to pick it?

In the Song of Solomon, the little Shulamite represents the Bride of Christ. She likes what she has. She has a garden. She is her Beloved's garden – He told her so (4:8). She believes that. One day, she says to Him, "Beloved, come into Your garden" (4:16b). That's when we invite Him in – when we feel very spiritual. "I have abundant fruit – love, joy, peace – and here it is, Lord, for You."

In the very next thought, He says, “Alright. Old friends, come on in” (5:1). The little Shulamite is standing there so happy with her garden, bearing so much fruit. “Hey. Wait a minute! I invited *You* in, my Beloved, not all *Your* friends.” Oh, I love to share love with the Lord, don’t you? I love to share joy with Him. I can even be fairly longsuffering with the Lord – when I’m feeling really spiritual. ☺ But His kids? His friends? – Oh, His friends! Do you know what they dared – do you know what His friends did to me? They came tromping through my garden and plucked off the fruit!

There I stand – I’m a tree. I’m a tree now with no fruit left, just a naked tree! ☺ And I say, “Lord, look at me! You let them in, Lord. You let all the Body of Christ come and pick my fruit. And now look at me! I’m stripped. What am I supposed to do now?” He said, “Grow more fruit. Reproduce in due season.”

Back to our story in Mark 8; look now at verse 25. What is the Lord going to do? We think we know what He’s going to do. He’s going to look at this man and say, “You faithless generation! You didn’t even have enough faith to say you could see!” Is that what the Lord says? Let’s see. “After that, Jesus put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up.” Church, as long as we are rootless, fruitless trees, we’ll never clearly see. When we get our eyes on the hypocrites we’re in trouble. I promise you, there are a lot of them in the church. We need to look *up*!

The Lord is walking around to His people today saying, “Look up. Hey! Look up.” If you won’t, if you refuse to focus on Him, your diverted attention makes it necessary for Him to dry up your brook (see 1Kngs17:7). He knows that will get your attention. When your source dries up, you *will* look up. Then you’ll sing “Jehovah-Jireh, my Provider.”

The Lord says to the once blind man, “Sir, thanks for your honest report.” How long since you have been that honest with the Lord? How long since you’ve been able to say, “Lord, I really want to believe that You’re ‘able to do exceeding and abundantly above all that I can ask or think,’ and that ‘it’s according to the power (Yours) that works in me’ (Eph.3:20). When I look around, I don’t see that. I don’t see fruit. I don’t see the commitments that you’re preaching. I don’t see it, Lord.”

If you’ll be that honest, you will hear Him say, “Look up. ‘Turn your eyes upon Jesus; Look full in His wonderful face.’” And something will happen to you, my Friend.