

I THANK GOD THAT I...

BY: BRAD CULLEN

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THE "APOSTLE" PAUL

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* THE "APOSTLE" PAUL

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this little book is controversial. As with most controversial subjects it really doesn't need to be controversial; and if we are willing to give up our preconceived ideas about the subject matter we will find that we just need to look at things from a slightly different angle. My prayer is that you will do one simple thing before reading the following (and/or giving it to someone else): Pray!

Holy Spirit, God's own presence here with me now, lead me away from the temptation to prejudice. Take away any preconceptions that will cause me to block out Your own light. Jesus promised that You would lead me into all truth. Open my eyes to the truth You want me to see. If you show me that the content of this book is not beneficial for me for now help me to see without judgment or criticism of others who think differently than I.

Thank You for Your faithfulness. I want only God's will and therefore I am praying in the true meaning of the term in Jesus' name, amen.

NOTE: Several people have asked me why I don't publish my writings. The primary answer is that I don't know how. The answer "inside" also indicates that each of us is the distributor and the publisher. Some estimates about an earlier book *Unlocking the Treasure Chest of God's Gifts* (2002) are that it was read by at least 20,000 people and probably more. My own estimate is closer to 10,000 based mostly on e-mail response. It has been translated into German, Polish, Japanese, Chinese, whatever the language of Ethiopia is called, and I believe seven other languages. It was never published, but people copied it in lots of 50 and more and it was mailed all over the world. I received e-mail from over forty different countries around the world, extolling the virtues of that little (75 page) book. I still get occasional requests for an "original" copy of *Treasure Chest*. Anyone that wants one has only to ask and it is sent free postage paid as long as the Lord provides the funds.

Some of you have asked me not to bind these little books because it makes them more difficult to photocopy. I've been having them bound with white covers and black spiral plastic binding which adds \$180 per 100 to the cost which apparently only impedes your and my publishing/distribution efforts anyway. So starting with this one no more covers. I received them freely and I am bound to give them freely. What you do with them is between you and God.

And... away we go!

CHAPTER ONE

The following is a topic about which I usually avoid writing – and have just become aware that I should not avoid it. I was praying and listening to Spirit and was shown that I must write about it and how to do so.

Several of you have written or called me to say that you are not able to hear the Spirit talking to you in the way I seem to say that I hear. And a reader in a distant State called just last night to ask, “How can I speak in tongues?”

My understanding is that Spirit is always broadcasting, so to speak, and it is up to us to “tune in.” I realize that is not very helpful to someone who wants to hear “the voice of God,” but doesn’t know how to get their antenna working properly.

It will be easiest for me to get into both of these topics that is, “hearing the voice of God” and “speaking in tongues” (literally languages that have not been learned by natural means) with a true story out of my own experiences.

But first, for those of you who insist upon scriptural references, let’s look at a couple:

“Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret tongues? But earnestly desire the greater gifts and moreover I show to you a more excellent way.” (I Corinthians 12: 30, 31)

The writer’s (Paul’s) questions in vs. 30 are obviously rhetorical and have a “no” answer. Some Christians believe that in vs. 31, by saying “earnestly desire the greater gifts,” Paul is indicating that healing and tongues are “lesser” gifts. In the following true story I will reveal my disagreement with that and why. Some Christians believe that by saying “I will show you a more excellent way” Paul is referring to the next (13th) chapter often referred to as the “love chapter.” The doctrine of some denominations is that the so called supernatural gifts have little value and if we have love we have it all. To me, what Paul is obviously saying is that the only way to exercise any spiritual gift is to do so in love – otherwise they have no value. This is evidenced by the first verse in chapter 13, “If I speak in earthly languages that I have not learned by natural means, or in the language of angels and do not love while speaking in these other languages, I have become like the noise of clanging brass cymbals.” Paul said elsewhere about another topic, “let everyone be convinced in their own mind.” The following story will hopefully help anyone understand how I arrived at my convictions.

It was at the beginning of a consulting project for a publishing company. The president of that company, a woman, who had been referred to me by a neighbor of hers who owned an industrial supply company and for whom I had designed a sales management and sales reporting system. Her publishing company had twenty-two sales representatives and she told her neighbor she wanted a better way to manage them. He recommended that she contact me.

Our initial interview was on a Saturday morning at her headquarters in a city in the Pacific Northwestern part of the U.S. Our preliminary dialogue revolved around some personal matters and religious belief systems. We discovered that we both had just gone through painful divorces that had a unique similarity. We had both been maligned by and estranged from the people in our respective churches due to our spouses both claiming we had engaged in adulterous relationships. The similarities were amazing. We spent over two hours sharing our spiritual beliefs, both of which were based on a personal and direct relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our conversation finally turned to business and I asked her several questions in my role as a sales management consultant. I uncovered a number of ways in which I thought I could help her company and told her I would get back to her in a week or so with a proposal.

I asked her if she was interested in getting together the following day for an outing revolving around a Bible study. Her two sons were with their father for the weekend, so she readily agreed. We planned a picnic in a scenic area just off the highway enroute to the Washington coast.

She had been raised and was a lifetime participant in a church that was part of a denomination that was highly skeptical and critical of the kind of “Pentecostal” or “Full Gospel” worship I had become comfortable with in recent years. Since she admitted to being a regular Bible reader, I raised the subject of an outing the following day by asking if she would be interested in seeing from the Bible why I had come to believe in Charismata – that is, the direct influence and involvement of the Holy Spirit in worship.

I picked her up the following morning (Sunday) and, after stopping at a market to select some things for our picnic, we were off driving to our planned destination. At her initiation our conversation was immediately centered on the topic of “speaking in tongues” (literally foreign or “angelic” languages both of which are unknown to the person speaking them and which have not been learned by natural means).

She had her Bible with her and I suggested she turn to the 14th chapter of First Corinthians and read several verses aloud starting with verse 18.

“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”

“That’s interesting,” she said musingly, “I know that I have read that passage literally dozens of times, but that particular verse never registered with me before just now.” I suggested she read verses 14 and 15 aloud also.

“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. Therefore I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray also with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the mind.”

She was silent for several moments. I knew something was brewing in her mind so I resisted the temptation to say anything.

“This is ridiculous,” she finally blurted out.

“How’s that,” I asked.

“Well, a friend of mine told me recently that tongues referred to praying in the spirit in a prayer language, but she couldn’t give me a reference so I kind of discounted what she said, and here is a passage that perfectly backs up what she was saying.”

“Want to read more?” I asked.

“Oh yes, this is rather interesting.”

“I do need to point out,” I said, “These references are generally used by your denomination and so many others like it to argue against speaking in tongues at all or ever. It is certainly true that Paul is obviously laying down some rules for speaking in tongues in an assembly. It is also obvious that he practiced speaking in tongues in private and, as he said, ‘more than you all.’ But go up to verse 2,” I suggested again.

“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands because he is speaking mysteries in his spirit.”

“I can hardly wait to call my friend and give her these references. This again backs up her statement that tongues are a prayer language,” she said.

“Okay, so why don’t you read verses 4 and 5 for us?”

“He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself...”

“Hold it for a moment,” I interrupted, “what does that mean to you?”

She was quiet for a moment before finally saying, “I suppose that it means it helps you grow spiritually – is that what it means to you?”

“I never thought of it quite that way before, but that does seem like a real possibility.” I responded.

“Do you speak in tongues?” She asked.

“I prefer to call it praying in the spirit or rather more technically letting Holy Spirit speak through me, but in answer to your question, yes I do. Why don’t you read verse 5...”

“I desire that you all speak in tongues...”

“Hold it right there,” I again interrupted. “The rest of the verse is Paul again urging to prophesy in meetings with others, as a general rule, especially when any uninitiated persons are present, rather than speak in tongues; but let’s look at the fact that he also is saying obviously that he wants all believers to pray in the spirit privately. If that is true, why do you think he is saying this?”

“You know,” she immediately replied, “I really do think that it is true and what is coming to me is that he wanted these people to grow spiritually and it goes back to the other verse where he says those who speak in tongues build up themselves because they are speaking to God. This makes so many other things in the Bible that seemed like mysteries before seem so clear. I am really excited, I am so glad you thought of getting together today. Frankly, I was prepared to drag out all the arguments I’ve heard over the years and have a rather vigorous debate with you about the whole subject. Now I just want to know how to move into this experientially. How about some help here?”

“Sure, but let’s find where we’re going to stop for our spread and then we can be a bit more methodical in our approach, okay?”

She agreed.

CHAPTER TWO

We spent the next hour setting out a large blanket and preparing and eating the things we had brought along. It was a beautiful, balmy, sunny day. The area was remote enough that the only sounds we heard besides the chatter of blue jays, the caw-caw cries of ravens and the lazy buzzing sounds of insects were an occasional car or truck passing on the highway about three quarters of a mile away.

We cleaned up the mess, but left the blanket spread out and took out our Bibles. She began, “One of the things I was ready to bring up as an argument was First Corinthians 12:30 where Paul asks, “do all speak in tongues?” and to which the obvious answer is ‘no’ what is your spin on that verse?”

“That everyone doesn’t speak in tongues and so what?” I answered. “Paul seems to also say in context that speaking in another tongue is a lesser gift and that we should concentrate or desire the greater gifts, particularly prophesying which edifies the whole church. My argument is that if tongues are used for speaking to God and not to man and that the practice builds us up in faith, wouldn’t that imply that we are being built up to minister to others in the church? And by ‘church’ I’m not talking about the building we’ve been accustomed to show up and in which we are spectators to a ritual.”

“Oh my, how I wish I had heard this whole thing years ago. I feel like I am miles behind and this would have cleared up so many things for me.”

“You know,” I said, “one of the problems is that people who do pray in languages they haven’t learned by natural means often wear the ability like a badge and it becomes a thing of spiritual pride, which defeats its purpose. Growing spiritually always means a growth in humility... that seems to be Paul’s point in saying, ‘If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal,’ in other words, a bunch of noise that accomplishes nothing, but he also talks about prophesying, sacrificing yourself by burning your body and charitable works in the same sentence – they are all nothing if not administered in the presence of God’s overriding love. In other words why pick on speaking in tongues? It seems to me that speaking in tongues is a foundation upon which other gifts are sought after because it builds our faith to do so. Does that make any sense?”

“Oh yes, absolutely. How do you go about starting?”

“Well, do you remember Paul’s remarks about praying with groaning in the spirit without understanding?”

“Yes,” she admitted.

“Well, approach it that way – simply; talk to God without understanding – start by reaching out by groaning without using your mind if that feels right to you. I want to show you something that may help enormously.” She looked at me expectantly without saying anything.

“For the last few years,” I continued, “I have focused on the words of Jesus rather than Paul. Jesus never made any direct reference, at least which is recorded in the New Testament, to speaking in languages he had not learned naturally. I have heard discourses that indicated Jesus did pray in the spirit or, perhaps better said, prayed without understanding. Some stuff included in those discourses had some fairly convincing evidence that he did. My thinking is that he probably did, but I usually refuse to talk about it simply because it just gets into arguments that are impossible to resolve, so what’s the point?”

I kept going, "Have you ever heard the term, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit?"

"Yes, my friend that talked about tongues being a prayer language used it, but in our church the term always used is being filled with the Holy Spirit."

"How would you like to be convinced that "Baptism in the Spirit" is a legitimate and meaningful Scriptural term?"

"Well, only if it is," she said with a little laugh.

"Fair enough," I said matching her chuckle with one of my own. Look up Matthew 3:11 and read it to me, if you don't mind."

"I baptize you in water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is stronger than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire."

"Oh, I see," she said, "isn't it amazing how we can read these verses over and over and yet they don't register in us what is being said?"

"Okay, now go to Mark 1:8..." "I have baptized you in water, but He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

"Now Luke 3:16..." "John answered and said to all, I baptize you in water, but He who is stronger than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire."

"John 1:33," I said to her. "And I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water, He said to me, He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, this is He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."

"So we see in all four Gospels that reference is made to a baptism in the Holy Spirit and that Jesus is the baptizer. Is the term beginning to seem more scriptural than you previously thought?"

"Of course," her glance at me indicated she was a bit impatient with my attempts to be condescending.

I apologized and told her I hadn't meant to be patronizing.

"Well, you did put me on guard for a moment. I don't need to be persuaded, you know, and I do appreciate what you are sharing. I just have a B.S. detector for salespeople and their manipulation. Since managing salespeople is your business, I assume it goes with the territory."

"Ouch and touché" was my only response.

"I'm sorry," she said, reaching over to touch my hand while looking at me directly. "I didn't mean to be insulting."

The look and her touch were electrifying. Warning bells were going off in my head. I felt like an idiot and realized for the first time just how attractive she was.

"I didn't think you were insulting at all," I assured her. "Trust me; the last thing I want to be with this topic is manipulative in any way. Let's move on, okay, with you?"

"Sure," she said lightly, and we seemed to have gotten safely beyond the moment.

"Try Acts 1:5 on for size." "For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

"Now, Acts 2:4," I said. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth."

"The reason I had you read this verse is just to point out that, speaking in tongues goes with the territory of being baptized in and filled with the Spirit. Both are legitimate terms. Someone told me several years ago that the best way to read the book of Acts was the same way you would read a novel rather than to study it. I found that all kinds of things jumped out at me when I approached it this way. For example, the story about when Peter was sent to Cornelius' house he needed to be prepared by the Spirit. He was given a vision of a huge sheet being lowered to the earth filled with animals considered by Jewish law to be unclean. He heard a voice say, 'Peter, rise

up and kill and eat.’ As you remember, Peter’s response was, ‘No way, Lord, I have never eaten anything unclean.’ As you remember he was given an understanding that he was supposed to go to the house of Cornelius to meet with a group of his family and friends, all gentiles. This was something up to this time that Peter had never done. Gentiles were ‘unclean’ and not to be associated with. Up until that time almost all Christians were Jews. As Peter later explained to some other early-church Jews who were critical of his going to Cornelius’ house and meeting with Gentiles...

“How about reading Acts 11:15, 16,” I continued. “While I was still speaking to them, the Holy Spirit came upon them just as it happened to us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.’”

“Now go back to chapter 10 and read verses 44 thru 46 and see what Peter is making reference to and see if you get another eye- opening confirmation.”

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. And the Jewish believers that had accompanied Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, for they heard them all speaking in tongues and praising God.”

“Okay, what does all this have to do with you speaking in tongues?” I asked her.

“It seems a bit confusing,” she said.

“I know it does, but I felt it was necessary for you to see two things about the baptism in, of, or with the Holy Spirit: First it is a valid scriptural term, agreed?”

She merely nodded her head with that same reaction that indicated I was using sales tactics and irritating her with them.

“There I go again,” I said, “ticking you off with manipulating garbage. I really do apologize.”

“No, I really need to apologize to you for being so sensitized to it. It seems quite natural as a mode of communication for you and I will try to get past my reactions. I didn’t realize I was being so obvious. I’m really embarrassed.”

“Okay, it sounds like we both have some learning to do so that we can communicate effectively if you accept my business proposal and we wind up working together. In other words I’m trying to say that you don’t need to be embarrassed, but I understand totally because I’m embarrassed for being so transparently a salesman.”

CHAPTER THREE

The tension passed and we both seemed a bit more relaxed and I continued: “I find that it is useful to go through some of what I refer to as doctrinal garbage about tongues and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Because, in my view, that doctrinal garbage is one of the biggest obstacles that keep people from experiencing both the baptism in the Spirit and praying in the Spirit. As I said earlier I’ve been focusing on what Jesus said, particularly his instructions about how to go about praying to get to the point of being more and more controlled by God’s Spirit. How about reading Luke 11:13?” I asked her.

“If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

“I don’t exactly remember where I first read it,” I began, but I’m going to share something with you that changed my life.” It had to do with the difference in sentence structure between English and Greek. The author pointed out two things: First, in English the verse you just read would have preceded this entire passage from verses 5 thru 13. In other words, in Greek the subject comes last which creates difficulties for those of us trying to understand something that is translated supposedly word-for-word and word-by-word into English. The point being that receiving the Holy Spirit is the subject, but to us reading the passage in this translation receiving more of the Holy Spirit seems to be almost an afterthought.

“The second point the author made was that the syntax of this sentence is a perfect example of how often things get lost in translation from Greek or Hebrew into English. The author claims that what Jesus was saying in the Aramaic language in which he spoke and Luke is quoting and writing in Greek, properly translated into English,

is that God is willing to give anyone who continually demands in the same way a small child does of a loving parent to get more and more of the Holy Spirit, that God will give ever more of His own Spirit. In the translation you are reading it sounds like Jesus is saying how much more likely it is that God will give us the Holy Spirit. So, I began to apply this entire passage, again, verses 5 through 13 by daily telling God I want more of His Spirit for whatever situation I find myself in... including meeting with you.

“What jelled for me is combining Jesus’ words in the first chapter of Acts about receiving the initial baptism in or with the Holy Spirit and this passage in Luke. We don’t need a man to lay hands on us although that is certainly how one group of people received the Baptism in the Spirit in the first six verses of the 19th chapter of Acts.”

She wanted to read it and did so.

“So we can see that Holy Spirit baptism can take place before there is an intellectual belief in Jesus Christ as in the case of Cornelius, his relatives and friends – in that incident it happened while Peter was still talking with them and there was no laying on of hands. It can take place by the laying on of hands as we see that Paul did in this passage you just read.

“The primary key to me of a deeper walk with our one and only perfect Dad is in the 3rd chapter of John’s Revelation of Jesus Christ. Where he quotes Jesus as saying that he is always standing at the door knocking and if we will just consciously open the door to our innermost being he will enter and have an intimate time of fellowship with us. Jesus said this is the antidote to the poison of spiritual lukewarmness. He will give us gold refined by fire, and pure white clothing to hide our spiritual nakedness and give us salve for our eyes so that we might see clearly in the Spirit. He is the baptizer in the Holy Spirit, so to answer your question, “How can you speak in tongues,” is to invite the Baptizer in the Spirit to come in and do it again and again. I invite him in daily, Jesus come in and baptize me anew with the fire of refined gold, I am sick of being lukewarm.

“I used to lay hands on people, but I have discontinued the practice for a variety of reasons except on rare occasions when I feel definitely led by Spirit to do so. Part of my thinking is, why have a man do something when the resurrected Jesus Christ who, Hebrews 13:8 tells us, ‘is the same yesterday, today and forever,’ will do it directly? I’m not about to make a doctrine out of it either way.”

There’s much more to this story, she and I did enter into a business relationship which was quite successful. Several months later we were married. Yes, she finally received a prayer language after taking long walks privately and crying out to the Lord for a baptism in the Spirit. She returned from one of these walks and told me that she still couldn’t speak in another language but that she had the assurance of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. I told her that was interesting since that was what had happened to me. First I had an assurance that I had received the baptism in the Spirit and later, as I continually beat on Dad’s door demanding more and more of His own Spirit, I was able to pray in the Spirit without understanding any of what I was saying, but knowing I was being built up in ever increasing faith.

At about midnight the same night she had come home from the walk during which she received the assurance that she had indeed been baptized in the Spirit I was awakened by her speaking in the most beautiful language I had ever heard; and she was doing so in her sleep! I told her about what had happened when she awakened in the morning, but it was many months later that she told me that she finally had a breakthrough into being able to both pray and sing in the Spirit privately. Sometimes in a gathering I will sing in the Spirit. Usually I am able to speak prophetically in a group and therefore speak in English when I am led to speak. In other words, ‘I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all,’ but in private. I refuse to get into arguments about publicly versus privately speaking in languages I have not learned; I’m merely sharing my own understanding and experience.”

CHAPTER FOUR

None of the foregoing was intended to lay out a new doctrine. As I told her, I am merely sharing my limited perspective from my own personal experience and understanding, but let’s see if a review of some things from that perspective can be helpful:

1. Tongues are nothing more and nothing less than languages neither understood nor learned by natural means and basically unknown to the person speaking or praying in them. Some of these languages are angelic and thus not a part of any earthly culture or ethnic group. Some may even be very human attempts and be merely gibberish or drivel. But so what? I go back to what Jesus said about making child-like demands for more of God’s own Spirit. He made an interesting analogy – would any of us less than perfect parents give our children a

serpent (note the symbolism here for Satan) when our child wanted a fish? (The symbol for Christ), of course not! So our perfect Daddy in the spiritual realm isn't going to allow that to happen either.

2. I personally, except on rare occasions, never "speak in tongues" in an assembly and only then if I or someone else has an interpretation in English.

3. I do not lay hands upon anyone for the experience, but rather encourage people to go to Dad or Jesus Christ directly.

4. Praying in the Spirit is a regular part of my own prayer life and personal worship.

5. I do not think of "praying in tongues" as either a "greater" or a "lesser" gift, but find it an important part of my spiritual life. I do not consider it as being necessary for anyone else nor do I gauge anyone else's spirituality by whether they speak in tongues.

6. If you find yourself curious about "tongues" pray for wisdom and remember that God gives wisdom to those who ask for that wisdom without being double minded. I have found that the best way for me to get rid of being double minded is to ask for Holy Spirit to remove all preconceived notions that get in the way of my being in God's perfect will.

7. The purpose of speaking in languages not learned by natural means is fourfold. a) Praying in the Spirit is one sign of the baptism in the Spirit. b) Speaking in tongues is a gift for personal praise and worship. c) Speaking in tongues is for talking in mysteries which only God understands. d) Finally, speaking in tongues with an interpreter can be a message from the Spirit to an assembly.

8. Speaking in languages not learned by natural means is often an "entrance" gift leading to more faith to receive other spiritual gifts.

9. I do echo Paul's sentiments: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all" and "I wish that you all spoke with other tongues."

An added thing to consider are Paul's words in I Corinthians 14:39 "... do not forbid speaking in tongues." But then if we want to use Paul's words as our guide, we may also want to look above to the 34th verse: "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves just as the Law also says." I can already hear some of my friends thinking, why on earth throw that in? My answer is simple it underscores how selective we all are about ignoring anything in the Bible that doesn't fit into our religious traditions and practice.

Oh yes, for me, praying in tongues preceded my ability to hear the Spirit. Another story may help us see something about that...

CHAPTER FIVE

I was facilitating a seminar with about twenty people on "how to hear the voice of God" based on materials miraculously given to an associate and me. I was staying in the home of a couple in the Sacramento, California area.

This couple was in what they referred to as the "deliverance ministry," that is, casting demons out of people. They had heard about us and had read some of our materials and the evangelist (well known in their denomination) who had mentored them in "deliverance" also knew us well and had recommended that they invite us to bring a weekend seminar on the topic of hearing the voice of God.

The meetings were to begin on Friday morning and last until late Sunday afternoon. My associate was unable to make the trip so I called the couple to tell them, but they urged me to come anyway because people had already made plans to come from different areas, some of which were many miles away.

I arrived as agreed early Thursday evening. I was amused as the couple came together to open the front door and meet me. They both had an unmistakable look of fear on their faces as they peered out at me about which I immediately guessed had to do with the topic of the meetings. After several awkward seconds they finally invited me in and they took my garment bag and overnight case to the bedroom in which I was to be sleeping.

After we were seated in the living room, I attempted to ease the tension by asking them how they had met the evangelist who had referred them and had told them about me. As we chatted about the evangelist some of their fears seemed to go away. We finally got to a point where we were able to relax and be open with each other. I took the opportunity to joke with them about how scared they looked when they first opened the front door at my arrival.

They admitted that while the evangelist did speak very highly of me that he also told them I had “Pentecostal leanings.”

“And what did that mean to you?” I asked with what I hoped was a gentle smile.

“I guess it meant to me that you were one of those ‘holy rollers,’ and well, you know...” the woman immediately answered and then drifted off in mid sentence, looking a bit sheepish.

“And how did you feel about that?” I asked.

“Well, we trust Reynolds” (the aforementioned evangelist), “but we were pretty scared about deliverance when he was first introduced to us,” her husband responded.

“When was that?”

“Oh, about a year and a half ago,” his wife answered.

“Tell me about some of your experiences,” I said and the conversation became very animated as they related a number of incidents in which they had been involved with people who were dramatically healed and delivered.

“So, once again, what makes you a bit scared about me?”

“Well, I’m past that, what about you, Ron?” she said.

“Yeah, you seem pretty normal,” he said with a laugh. “I guess I’m just being a bit nervous about what other changes may be about to happen in our lives again. Deliverance has changed the way we look at everything.”

“Yes,” she added earnestly, “we already find ourselves looked at differently by the other members of our church and our pastor is probably at the point of asking us to leave. Reynolds has helped us through a lot of this, but I’ve spent all thirty-five years of my life in the church, and Ron too, it just feels strange. Do you know what I mean?”

“Of course,” I responded quickly, “I understand completely and I’m sure some of my experiences parallel yours. Reynolds and I still have all kinds of doctrinal differences, but the bond between us is Jesus Christ and we’ve kind of got to the point that we’re willing to leave minor points of doctrine to our individual consciences and concentrate on our mutual and equal ministry with one Father, Leader, Teacher and Elder Brother and I guess one way to put it, is just that we love and respect each other and forget about our differences.”

“That’s pretty rich,” Ron said, and Lorraine nodded her agreement.

Any tension simply fell away and we talked almost until midnight before agreeing that we ought to get some sleep.

CHAPTER SIX

The next morning things began to happen that were nothing short of amazing. The first person to arrive was a building contractor who was part of their four person deliverance team. Len’s wife, Sylvia, couldn’t be there until later that afternoon, he explained. Lorraine and Ron told Len that they wished he and Sylvia had been with us the previous evening. “We had most of our questions and reservations resolved” is how Lorraine rather enthusiastically put it. I wanted to ask her to elaborate, but felt a “check” against doing so and just remained quiet.

Len didn’t look the least bit fearful, but he certainly carried an air of suspicion and skepticism and I knew we might be in for a rough time... “Help,” I silently prayed.

The rest of the group had all arrived by ten a.m. and Lorraine handled the introductions. We were seated in a circle in a large, sunny recreation room just off the kitchen with two walls having large windows giving an expansive view of their large, well manicured back yard.

Len settled into a recliner chair with his back toward me! Lorraine started off by saying they had spent several hours with me the previous evening and that everyone was in for an interesting time. She reiterated the fact that I had been invited because of the strong recommendation of Reynolds. She then asked Ron to lead us in a prayer after which the meeting began, understandably with everyone (but Len) looking at me expectantly.

“Why are we here?” I finally asked.

“Well, I came,” said a woman at the far end of the room, who looked to be the oldest person there, “to hear what you have to say about hearing the voice of God.” The others seemed to all nod in agreement, except for Len who let out an audible snort.

“Okay, Lord,” I prayed silently, what do I do with this?

“Hey Len,” I started, “I’ve had enough training in group dynamics to know that someone sitting with their back to me probably indicates hostility. How about us clearing the air, do you feel like sharing with us what’s going on?”

“I don’t have any hostility toward you,” Len said, still looking the other way with his back turned to me. “I just want to know why we need you, we have the Bible and the red books” (referring to some doctrinal statements in several volumes by one of the founders of their denomination).

“You don’t need me,” I said emphatically, but Jesus made it clear that we are to be brothers and sisters and minister to one another, so I need you. How about turning your chair enough so that you are at least a visible part of the group?”

Without a word, Len immediately folded down the leg rest, stood and maneuvered the chair so that he was facing the entire group. I merely said thanks and that what he had said about the Bible and the red books was true. “Why do you need me?” I asked to the group generally.

“Well, I can tell you one reason,” Lorraine, responded, “after last night I know I can learn a lot from you.”

“Ah, but I learned a lot from you as well. In the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul said, ‘Whenever you meet let everyone be prepared in the Spirit to bring a Psalm or a spiritual song, or a teaching or a prophecy, and at anytime someone received a truth from the Lord, let the first person stop and hear what is being said. So, Len, in a very strong way you did exactly that. I am not here to teach about anything. I am here to participate with a group that wants to hear from the Holy Spirit and share with one another what we are getting individually. One of the things that always amaze me is how people from different denominations that cannot seem to agree about much else sing the exact same spiritual choruses.’ I picked up my baritone ukulele from where I had placed it on the floor and started to sing, ‘Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised’ and everyone joined in. They too, knew this particular song.

We sang a number of spiritual songs. One had the line in it “I will lift up my hands unto the Lord.” Every time we reached the line, “I will lift up my hands unto the Lord” the entire group would raise both hands and then immediately put them down. I stopped and shared a number of scriptures about praising God with uplifted hands and told them that I found their lifting their hands so briefly was amusing to me.

“What are you saying?” Lorraine asked.

“Just lift your hands, Lorraine, and praise Him right now,” I said. She did so and I was immediately shocked. A very beautiful sounding and soothing language started emanating from her mouth. She looked frightened and covered her mouth with both hands.

“Why are you stopping,” I asked?

“Yeah, that was so beautiful,” a young man seated near her said meaningfully.

“Is that all right to do?” Lorraine asked, “I felt so peaceful and blessed, but everything we’ve been taught in our church says such things are actually from the devil.”

“Let’s look at some passages of scripture,” I told her, “and let’s talk about it as a group.” I referenced several of the same passages I used back in chapter 3. Soon, almost everyone was quietly and privately worshipping God with uplifted hands in the presence and power of the Spirit. Len was not participating, but looked positively moved nonetheless.

There was no question in my mind that the Lord had engineered this experience to draw us closer to Him and to one another in love.



I finished chapter four, as you may recall with the following words as an introduction to this true story:

“Oh yes, for me, praying in tongues preceded my ability to hear the Spirit. Another story may help us see something about that...”

My thought when I wrote the foregoing about the beginning of that weekend was to tell about what happened that night (Friday evening) about 7:00 p.m. We had taken a break to share a buffet that Lorraine and some of the others had prepared. I felt as close to these people in the Spirit as in any group with which I’ve ever been a part.

The doorbell rang and my life was about to be dramatically changed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ron returned from answering the door and whispered something to Lorraine and they both walked toward that area of the house again. Ron came back and cornered Len and Sylvia and they went with him to the door. After a few minutes Lorraine came back and told me that a man was at their door asking for prayer for his wife and asked if they could come to his house because she was obviously possessed by evil spirits. Lorraine apologized for the four of them leaving the group, but said she felt they should go with the man. I agreed and she left again.

Several moments passed and Ron and Lorraine came back again and said that the four of them wanted me to go with them if I would, since Reynolds had told them that I “worked powerfully in deliverance.” I told them that of course I would accompany them. Lorraine simply announced to the group, now mostly seated and busy eating and talking, that the five of us had to attend to a woman that was under severe attack and to just make themselves at home and we would return as soon as possible and as far as the seminar was concerned it was over for the day anyway and please be back before ten in the morning and we would reconvene.

The man had already left for his home and we piled into Ron’s Buick station wagon. We drove somewhere out in the country and finally headed down this long driveway. As we approached the house, a large two story rustic place that was situated on a river, we could hear the moaning of the man’s wife, Sharon, while we were still inside the car with all the windows rolled up. When we parked and got out we heard her desperate cries, “Oh no-o-o-o-o, no-o-o-o-o-o, no-o-o-o-o-o help me.”

Her husband, Bob, was standing there waiting for us. They quickly introduced him to me and we went inside and up the wide carpeted, circular staircase to where the sounds were coming from. The four were obviously looking to me for leadership. I told them that I would just sit by praying while they dealt with the situation. Sharon was lying on the largest bed I have ever seen. She was thrashing about incessantly and continued to moan loudly. I led Bob to a couple of chairs that were at the other end of their rather enormous master bedroom. The story came out that the onset of Sharon’s problems was immediately after the birth of their now three year old daughter. Sharon had not touched the child since they came home from the hospital and she had attempted suicide several times and Bob’s mother kept the child at her home about a five minute drive away. It had been several months since Sharon had last seen their daughter.

Sharon was a registered nurse, but had not worked since the end of her sixth month of pregnancy. She was bitter and angry about not being able to work and resented their daughter and had said many times that she wanted nothing to do with her.

Meanwhile, Ron, Lorraine, Len and Sylvia were kneeling by the bed praying for guidance as to what to do. After several minutes they gathered some chairs around the bed and began to talk to Sharon.

One of the hallmarks of anyone trained and mentored in “deliverance” by Reynolds is that they get the person to lie down on his or her back and tell the person not to pay any attention to what they are saying, because they are going to speak to the demons and get the demons to speak to them. They instruct the person to just focus on Jesus Christ and talk to him and ignore them. They went through these preliminary instructions with Sharon. I had to fight down the feelings of criticism. What they were doing would take a long time and I had discarded the elongated process as unnecessary about four years previously in favor of simply asking God’s Spirit to lead me into understanding and ask questions of the subject person and then cast the spirits out if that was what I was led to do. The sessions with which I was involved were reduced in time from three and more hours and even longer, sometimes spanning several days of additional sessions, to less than one hour including a preliminary interview with the person and the post deliverance instruction I had been given to share with them about keeping free from future demonic control.

After about an hour I motioned to Bob to follow me to the bed where we sat on the opposite side of where Len, Lorraine, Ron and Sylvia were ministering. I was praying silently and thanking Dad for leading me away from my earlier thoughts and feelings of criticism, but I knew I was still harboring some critical thoughts about using what I had come to consider was such an archaic approach. After about three hours total the two couples started commanding demons to leave the woman. She started to exhale in short brief spurts as the demons were leaving her. I cannot explain this phenomenon but it often happens during this process – an almost panting sound as the demons make their exit. I saw in the spirit some black entities leaving her mouth (not unlike the depictions in the movies “Ghost” and “The Green Mile”).

I began “laughing in the spirit.” Bob sitting next to me on the bed was looking at me as if I was crazy and seemed a bit offended. I explained to him that it was a reaction of pure joy because I knew that his wife was being set free. Thankfully, he seemed to be relieved and totally reassured.

What happened next is the reason for relating this story. I heard what I thought was the Holy Spirit or an angel speaking in a soft melodious voice such as I had never heard before: “She is tired, let her rest now.”

I was about ready to report what I had just heard and I realized that I needed to “test the spirits.” This is an interpretation I was given from the Spirit during a look at the original language of a passage that says in English “not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits to see if they are from or of God.” The test is simply to ask the spirit speaking if it will readily confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, that is, if the Creative Spirit part of Elohim-God became the man Jesus the Christ. I did this quietly and felt certain that I would get an immediate “yes” answer in my spirit. Instead I was shocked by the most evil and hideous sounding laugh I had ever heard. It was so loud-sounding inside of me that, if I hadn’t had several years of experience, I would have thought it was audible and that everyone else heard it as well.

I immediately understood what was going on and prayed silently as to what, if anything, to do about it. The answer I received (and tested) was that my feelings of superiority to the two couples and my critical feelings were nothing more and nothing less than spirits attacking me because I had opened the door because of my earlier criticism and that I should confess it to the two couples ministering as well as to both Bob and Sharon as the sin it was and allow the Holy Spirit to use it as an example of instruction. I told all of them that I had just heard something from the Lord that I was supposed to share.

“I just heard this most beautiful voice tell me that Sharon was tired and should rest now. I was about to share that with all of you and tested the spirits (the two couples ministering nodded knowingly) and heard the most hideous, evil laugh you could imagine. Sharon, I know you are tired, but I also know that you are almost free and you realize it, is that true?”

She merely nodded through her continued short but forced exhaling and inhaling.

“The enemy wants to interrupt the process, but I’m betting this is the best you’ve felt in three years and certainly don’t want to quit, is that right?”

“I don’t want to stop until they are all gone,” she sputtered through the punctuated gasps.

“I’m supposed to confess something to all of you. The Lord told me that the reason I was so open to attack was that I was critical of how you are ministering deliverance, because I don’t do it that way any longer. That indicates

two things to me. One is that we are all open to attack when we are critical or judgmental and if we harbor critical and judgmental thoughts we can become severely invaded as you have Sharon. I'm sorry I interrupted you guys," I said to the two couples, "but I know that I was supposed to."

"I'm just glad you were obedient to do it," Len said, with his outstretched hand to shake mine -- every last vestige of earlier tension between us had evaporated.

The end of that story has many facets, one of which was very amusing albeit tragic. Ron called me long distance a couple of weeks later to tell me that Bob and Sharon had their little girl back home with them and mommy and daughter were getting along beautifully as were Bob and Sharon. The girl was adjusting quite well and Bob's mother was ecstatic over being relegated back to the position of being a grandmother rather than raising the little girl. The amusing but tragic part of the story is that Sharon was able for the first time in three years to attend church. She and Ron openly told the story about how she was delivered from demons that were causing severe arthritic attacks and impulses to commit suicide along with hating and actually wishing her little girl would die.

Upon hearing the reports about Bob and Sharon's sharing the good news of her deliverance, the pastor of the church telephoned and asked them to come to his office. They were amazed that he told them that there was to be no more conversation about demons. Neither the denomination nor he personally believed in such things he told them and he didn't want the congregation disturbed. Bob pointed to some of the scriptures that the two couples shared with them after Sharon was completely free and the pastor told Bob not to "presume to teach" him. He told them it would be better for them to leave and not return. When Sharon and Bob both expressed their amazement and asked him if he wasn't happy for their family being reunited and Sharon being healed of some debilitating pain as well as the mental oppression, he basically ignored the question and told them that under the church's charter he had the authority to dismiss them from fellowship and he was further forbidding them from ever coming back!

How is this amusing? Well, we'll come back to that a bit later. The five of us shared with the rest of the seminar group the next morning what had happened. Several of them knew Bob and Sharon and were elated. How my life was so dramatically changed is I became more committed than ever before, to daily follow Jesus' instructions to get rid of all feelings and thoughts of criticism and judgment, realizing just how dangerous they are. This was the life change I needed, but the temptation continues. It is why I must each day go through the same cleansing process Jesus not only taught, but practiced himself.

The amusing part of the story or perhaps better stated, bemusing part is that over and over I have seen leaders in an organized church get threatened and react almost violently to people that have been dramatically healed or touched by the Lord. They are powerless to help and yet attempt to tightly control a congregation so that it doesn't get involved in such things. The aforementioned evangelist refers to this phenomenon as "spirit of control which seems to attack church pastors and thereby stifle the work of the Holy Spirit through others."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Well, Dad, I'm sensing that this little treatise needs to be brought to a close. What do you have for us as an ending?

Well now, do you believe in coincidences? I just received another call from a person living in Northern California. She has had several experiences of late that have sorely tested her faith. After some preliminary chit chat, she asked me if she was bothering me and if I was busy. My response was that I was just finishing writing a short book and she would be getting a copy. She asked me what it was about and I read the title from the cover page, "I Thank God that I..." and said it was something Paul wrote in First Corinthians and the completion of the sentence goes, "Speak in tongues more than you all."

She shared with me that she had been to a women's retreat last fall and that she wound up being the only person there who did not "receive the gift of tongues." She said she felt embarrassed and confused by the experience. The retreat leader had laid hands on her and she said she felt a momentary sense of something and spoke a few words, but that it was all drivel. I prayed silently as to what I should say, if anything, in response. As she continued to relate the experience I couldn't help but agree with what she told me the woman who had laid hands on her had said. Basically she had told her that she had received and that she should continue to practice speaking.

"That makes just no sense to me," she told me. She had told that to the woman as well.

I feel a bit of Holy Spirit-inspired instruction coming on, about it not making sense to her. In fact she went on to say that in her view it was nonsense. But I was led to tell her something quite unexpected. I wanted to read to her my recounting of Lorraine's experience back in chapter 6, but felt restrained by Spirit from doing so.

I asked her if she wanted to speak in tongues and she responded affirmatively. I told her that I thought this book might fill in some of the blanks, "but for now," I said, "Just go into your bedroom or somewhere private away from all those people," (I could hear the voices of several people in the background) "and just talk to your Daddy without thinking. Just praise Him, but don't do it in English and stop trying to understand or even listen to yourself." She agreed to do that and I have no idea yet what the outcome will be, but she calls me occasionally and I expect to hear from her again soon.

Here's the instruction I'm getting from Spirit for anyone bothered by not being able to speak in tongues. Stop worrying about it. Say to Him right now, if speaking in languages I haven't learned is something you want me to do, I want to do it. I want Your will and I want more of Your Spirit with which to do everything within Your will." Stop trying to make sense out of anything with your finite mind. Consider Paul's words in the second chapter of First Corinthians vs. 9-16:

"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But to us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also that no one has known except the Spirit of God. But we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God; Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words. But a man bound in worldly wisdom does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are understood spiritually. But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."

The final word I am given for some is this: We do not receive more of God's Spirit or more faith or an expansion of our spiritual talent or gift by saying, "If God wants me to have more He will give me more." Getting more comes from desiring more and demanding more. The confusion surrounding that statement comes from the argument that you cannot demand anything from God and expect to get it. That argument is diametrically opposed to the instructions provided by Jesus who also said to get and use supernatural faith with which to do supernatural things. Paul said, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all" and "I wish that you all spoke in tongues." Arguments against either are just plain silly. "Knock, seek and demand" (the word in the original language translated into the English word "ask" is "aiteo" and it means DEMAND it because it is promised and therefore due).

I want to write another chapter but I hear a "tested" STOP! If you want to discuss the topic further let's do it. Now's not the time for a one-sided diatribe by me. The promise is that Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth.

[END]

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