**GOD’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

as told by

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**HISTORY**

The Lord was working on things and people who affected my life long before I knew Him, even before I was born. My grandparents Eckert came from Germany just before 1900. My grandfather met my grandmother and her parents on the boat coming over to America. They landed in Galveston, Texas. She and her parents settled there but he went inland to Houston. They continued communicating and married about two years later, after he had bought some farmland north of Houston and built a home.

My grandfather came to America because his family was sending him to safety. The family was of a long line of gardeners for the Kaiser in Germany. They were peace-loving people. They could see that Germany and Europe were gearing up for war. So, they sent my grandfather away to the United States at the age of 19, knowing they would never see him again; the ease of travel then being nothing like it is today. That is the extent of my knowledge of Grandfather Eckert’s family history. God’s hands were working in a peace-loving German Catholic family.

On the other hand, a large part of my grandmother’s family immigrated to America. My grandmother’s sister was a nun in Houston at St. Joseph Hospital. I remember her as a very faithful, gentle and loving woman. All of the many Eckerts on my grandmother Rieger’s side were very gentle, peaceful, loving people.

I was 2 or 3 years old when I had appendicitis. That was 1932 or 1933 and there were no antibiotics, no body scans and probably no remarkable x ray equipment. My appendix ruptured. A ruptured appendix with peritonitis was expected to be fatal in those days. I was hospitalized in St Joseph’s Hospital in Houston for 2 or 3 weeks and was expected to die. I did have surgery at first with an open drainage. While I was in the hospital my mother was with me 24/7 praying and tending to me. My grandmother’s sister, the nun, was often at bedside with me. Often my great uncle Walter Hurley, who had raised my mother, was with me, also. I remember these things, some very clearly. One day I remember hearing a voice calling me, saying “Come.” As a little child, I thought it was a *“good humor man”* [ice cream vendor] outside my hospital window. In those pre-air conditioning days the windows of my room were open. I told my mother that I had to go because I was being called. My mother was spiritually perceptive. She said, “You aren’t going anywhere!” and set herself to praying again. It wasn’t until thirty years later, at age 33, that I again heard and then accurately recognized that voice.

The years of my youth on the family farm were nice and peaceful. We were a typical honest, hard working German farm family. My mother raised my two brothers and me in the Baptist church. There was no religious conflict in our family. My Catholic father worked seven days a week and my Baptist mother took the 3 of us boys to the Baptist church on Sundays. I received everything that that Baptist church could provide for life and fellowship, thank God!

I was considered born again one particular Sunday when I was 11. Nothing big or new seemed to have happened to me that day because I had “always” believed in Jesus. Our religious tradition was such that I needed to walk the aisle, shake the pastor’s hand, and make a public commitment to the Lord Jesus. I did. On the way home from church I asked my mother, *“Mama, what’s next?”* She thought a bit, and said, “Well, now you be good and read your Bible.” She named several additional good helps. I thought, *“I’m already doing those things!”* Year after year, I had attended Sunday School, been on time, faithfully read my Bible, and had some coins to put in the offering. There were about 10 things that, if I did them all, I would be “100% each week, and I had already been 100% week after week for years. My Mom didn’t know anything more to tell me than that little list, until years later when I began to walk with the Lord. Then she eventually saw my deeper walk, realized that there was more than those 10 things, and became more perceptive.

During my high school and college years things of God became less and less important to me. It requires 20/20 hindsight to see His presence and faithfulness during those years. One of those major things of His presence occurred when I was a student at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. In my fourth year I took a course in organic chemistry that was ordinarily reserved for nursing students and home economics majors. It was called “baby organic chemistry,” or “foods organic chemistry” -- that type of chemistry. In that class I met Nancy. The Lord had prepared her to be the one I would share life with. It was not then obvious to us or to anyone that it was the Lord’s life we shared, at least on my part. It was the usual human relationship and life that we shared. Nancy was in a much better spiritual walk than I was, as far as living for the Lord.

We married in 1952. I worked in industrial safety for four years, then went to the University of Houston for one year to qualify for application to medical school. We had two sons when we entered the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, then interned at Memorial Hospital in Corpus Christi, Texas where our third son was born. After internship we entered practice in Galveston County, and soon had our fourth son. Nancy is currently writing the story of our lives as family.

It was nearing time for the Lord to strike.

In medical school I had met an Episcopal minister, Graham Pulkingham. We became moderately close. Nancy and I had become Episcopalians and he was the Episcopalian minister on campus. On Sunday evenings, about twenty medical students and wives would gather at the Canterbury House, which was the Episcopal Student Center on campus. We would spend an hour or so going through Scripture. We would read some verses, usually led by Graham, and then comment on them. By the time we finished commenting we had either reinterpreted or “removed” those verses from the Bible by saying, *“Obviously this doesn’t apply anymore” or “This is probably a misinterpretation…”*  We did all kinds of things to obliterate the scriptures and to prevent their having any effect in our lives. It was a time of the blind leading the blind.

The reason I mention our Canterbury House experience is because after I had been in medical practice for three years we were about to be re-united with the Pulkinghams. We were apparently doing really well in life. You know the standards: I drove a new car every year, we had a nice, big and fancy home, and this farm boy was now “Doctor Eckert” with all of society’s rank and privileges thereof. To display my success I decided to contact Graham, who in our few years apart had gone from Galveston to Austin and then to Houston where at that time he was the rector at Church of the Redeemer-Episcopal. When I located him, I called and asked if he and wife Betty could come for a Saturday evening dinner and visit. I was intent on showing him what a great life I had going; how wonderful and polished I had made my life! But he said, *“Sorry, I can’t make it this week. Call some other time.”* I called again the next week. He had the same excuse and said the same thing. *“I can’t make it this week. Call some other time.”* The third week I called him. He was in the middle of giving me a similar excuse for not coming when he stopped and said, *“But we’ll be there.”* So he and Betty were there on Saturday night for supper and the display of my goodies.

After supper we four just sat back at the table. I thought I would give him the first opportunity to describe the things that were going on in his life. His being a preacher, it shouldn’t take very long, maybe no longer than five or ten minutes, for him to exhaust his short list of accomplishments. That would give me an hour or two to talk about all the big, wonderful things in my life, and so forth. I asked him, *“Graham, what’s been going on since the last time we were together?”*  He started telling me about God leading him, speaking to him and working through him. Physical, mental and situational miracles had been happening before his eyes.

When he started I listened patiently for awhile. As I began to get the picture he was painting, it really disturbed me. I thought, *“What’s wrong with my friend? Does he have some mental disturbance? Is he delusional?”* I dismissed that as I had also dismissed the possibility of his being a rank liar. For two hours he shared those kinds of things. After the first hour it began to dawn on me that the things of his testimony were also in Scripture. They were things that had also happened in the Bible.

Having been raised in the Baptist church, I knew all those Bible stories about miracles. But for my personal life Bible things were in the distant, non-functional, unreal past. Here was Graham, a respected and trusted friend, seated across the table, in living presence, telling me of his having seen and participated in actual, biblical-type miracles. For the first time in my life I was hearing that aspect of the Gospel from someone who could testify to its present reality and applicability. The only appropriate response I could muster during the first hour was to make fun of him, telling him, “Graham, you need to see a doctor, and you know which kind,” pointing to my head. I laid into him in that way. He kept talking.

In the second hour of his testimony a different thing began to go on inside of my head. I said to myself, *“That’s Bible! That’s just like it says in the Bible!”*  I began to say some things to God. At that time it was “God,” which is a distant and impersonal title for Him compared to “Lord” or “Jesus” or “Father.” I wasn’t yet able to call Him “Lord” and I wasn’t speaking to Jesus. Next I said, *“God, I want that…that which Graham has. I want that.”* That was a real miracle. That which I was asking for was Graham’s relationship with the Lord. It wasn’t that I wanted to see miracles or do miracles. It wasn’t that at all. The big miracle that evening was that I saw a relationship between Graham and “God,” and I wanted it. So I said those things to “God,” and then I described it to Him, saying, *“I want that relationship that Graham has. I want you to be number one in my life.”*

When I said that I felt terrible. I can remember that I almost felt like I had an upset and burning stomach. I FELT SICK! I knew I had just said something absolutely wrong. After I had thought about it a bit, the Lord showed me that what I had said was indeed wrong. Although I had now wanted Him to be my Number One for the first time in my life, He didn’t want to be my Number One. He wanted to be my whole life. He didn’t want to have any competition with any numbers two, three and so forth. When I saw that, I almost said out loud [because all this was going on inside me while Graham continued talking], “OH, I SEE!” So I followed that with, *“I don’t want You to be my number one, I want You to be my whole life.”* It didn’t take long after that, just a few seconds later, when I said (I was still talking silently to “God”), *“In fact, if it’s not going to cost all of my life, if it’s not going to cost ALL OF ME, I’m not going to start.”*

Somehow, I saw the unsurpassed value of what the Lord was offering me. All of me had to go. My confidence at that point was that God could accomplish all of my “going.” It wasn’t like “I can do that; I can accomplish all of my going.” I knew the Lord could do it. The pressure was off of me and the commitment was made, *“All of You, God, for all of me.”*

Graham and Betty went home that night. Nancy and I went to bed. No one but “God” and I knew what had happened.

At that time I was in a rural and small-town general medicine practice with another doctor. Communications and the practice of medicine were considerably different in those days. Our patients knew both of us. If one doctor didn’t answer his phone [when out of town or otherwise off duty] our patients knew to call the other doctor. People knew one other and communicated differently. Nancy and I had gone to bed and I was off duty for the weekend. I would always answer the phone when I was off duty because most things could be taken care of over the phone, and if not, then the patient would gladly call the other doctor. If they needed to be seen, I would just say so and they would call my associate.

The phone rang sometime around 2:00 AM. For the first time I decided I wasn’t going to answer it. I kept my eyes closed so I wouldn’t wake up too much. I figured it would ring just a few times but it rang and rang and rang. It must have rung at least 25 times before it stopped. Then I said a little prayer without really meaning it to be a prayer. I just said, *“God, let that person call back.”* I was really convicted, I guess you would say. So I lay there in bed for about 20 minutes before the phone rang again.

I got it on the first ring. It was this particular patient, Bertha. She had been one of my first patients. I had seen her in my office about once a month. She lived on Galveston Island and I was in medical practice on the mainland. But for some reason, from the beginning she had come all the way to the mainland to see me. She was a young mother who spent much of her life in a mental institution because she was afflicted with catatonic schizophrenia. She would come to see me when she saw herself sliding into trouble. I would work with her to see how she was doing and help her if I could. If not, I would admit her to the hospital under the care of a psychiatrist. She had two little girls of early school age. The three lived in an apartment. When she was in the hospital, the welfare department would put the two girls in a foster home. When she got out of the hospital the welfare department would give them back to her. At her best, about all Bertha could do was car hop, meaning she could carry food and make change.

She said with her frozen, catatonic voice,

*“Dr. Eckert, this is Bertha. I came home from work tonight and went into the kitchen. I got a butcher knife. I went into the kids’ room to kill them and kill myself, but I felt like I had to call you first. I went down to the [all night] drug store and called you but you weren’t home. I sat down to have a cup of coffee before I went home and did it, but called you again just in case you got home, and you’re home now.”*

As I listened to her go through that little story I began to realize that I had one of those “things” going on like Graham had described going on in his life.

So I talked to Bertha. She had never been hostile, suicidal or homicidal before. As I talked to her, she became her usual self. I was assured of that so I told her,

*“Bertha, go home now and go to bed. Come see me at the office Monday morning, but if you get into any trouble before then call me and come straight to my house. ”*

She assured me that she would. Monday morning, there she was at the office. She was emotionally and physically stiff. She could hardly talk because of her catatonia. So I started talking to her medically, as I had many times before. Then I remembered some of the things Graham had told me, so I said,

*“Bertha, will you do something for me?”*

*“Yes, Dr. Eckert.”*

*“Would you get up from your chair, get in your car, drive to Houston and talk to a friend of mine and then come right back to my office?”*

I didn’t want there to be any failure in this. If Graham couldn’t help her spiritually, I wanted her to come back so that I could medically.

*“Well, yes, Dr. Eckert.”* There *was a bit of puzzlement in her voice, but she was agreeable.*

She got in her car and headed for Houston, which was about an hour’s drive one way. Before she got back to the office I got a call from Graham after he had seen her. He said,

*“Bob, why did you send that lovely, vivacious young lady up here?”*

*“Which lovely vivacious young lady?”* I replied.

The Lord had healed Bertha between my office and Graham’s office. He just healed her! In fact, she related a testimony to Graham about how she had become catatonic schizophrenic. She had been raised in a Pentecostal church. In her teens she had turned away from the Lord and church and gone into a life of sin. She now had the insight to be able to understand how she had been overcome. She and Graham had a great time rejoicing in the Lord. I had to get to know Bertha again because I had never known her like she now was. She was free and well, and she stayed that way.

That had occurred on Monday after Graham had talked to Nancy and me on Saturday night. On Tuesday I was again in the office. I heard a woman’s voice screaming and screaming. I stepped out of the examining room into the hallway. Coming through the emergency room area was another woman. She can be described as having the most inadequate personality I have ever seen. She couldn’t face anything in life. She also had two school-aged girls. I saw each one of those little girls in the office probably twice a week. They were almost *always* well because if one of them sneezed or coughed during the night or *any* time, Mother zipped them into the office, ringing her hands just *knowing* that they were seriously ill. I would examine the girl, and then reassure Mom. But she couldn’t help herself. She was so fearful and insecure that she took the girls’ rectal temperatures three times a day to make sure they were not getting an infection. If the reading was off by half a degree [which is normal variation] she would bring them to the office.

This screaming lady was her. At first I didn’t recognize her because she was so distraught. That was the only time I have ever seen someone actually pulling hair because they were distraught. I got her in an examining room. When I was able to recognize her my first thought was, *“Uh-oh, something has happened to one of the girls. One of them must have been run over by an 18-wheeler,”* or something like that. That was my thought. So, I calmed her down and asked her what was going on. She said, *“Nothing. Nothing is going on.”*  Life had just become too much. I talked with her a little bit, then said,

“*Would you get in your car, drive to Houston, and talk to a friend of mine, but come right back to my office?”*

*“Well, yes.”* was her trusting reply.

And she did that. She came back the most confident person about life that I will ever meet!

Being a doctor, my medical practice was fertile soil for the Lord to reach me. He was customizing every situation to match my soul. Nancy and I had been planning a trip to New Orleans for a three-day medical education trip. It was a chance to be away, to have a big blast, and maybe learn a few things. We were supposed to begin that trip on Wednesday. But after Monday and Tuesday, I particularly wanted to find out what was going on in Graham’s church. We had been making our plans for New Orleans with another doctor and his wife from El Paso. We were to meet them there but they had to cancel out. We, too, cancelled out in order to go to Houston and find out what was going on in Graham’s church. We already had arrangements made to be gone from the medical practice and for someone to take care of our kids. And so, we just went to Houston instead.

We hung around the church. Graham introduced us to a few people, some of whom he had described in his testimony the past Saturday evening. They were all normal looking people to me! It didn’t look like anything miraculous had ever happened in their lives. They simply looked *normal*.

So on Thursday Graham and I were talking about what we needed to do in order to pursue, understand, and get more involved in what God was doing along the ways of our recent days. We both agreed that we needed a Bible teacher. That was a big step for an Episcopal minister -- to say that he needed someone to teach him the Bible. But he admitted it. We were both in over our heads. Graham knew of a traveling Bible teacher, a Canadian named Earl Frid, who was then in Houston. Graham asked him to come to the church on Thursday night to teach a small group of us. He agreed to come but only if he could teach what God told him to teach. We both thought this was an unusual way to talk about teaching whatever he wanted to teach, but we said okay if that’s the way he wanted to do it.

He came. There were five couples of us gathered in a big circle in the choir rehearsal room. Earl talked for about an hour and a half, from the Bible and through first-hand testimony. The entirety of his teaching was that God doesn’t lie. He didn’t teach us anything “deep” nor did he go to a bunch of places in the Bible and open scriptures to us. The only scripture that I recall his using was out of the Gospels where Jesus said that if anybody asked for the Holy Spirit, God would give it to them. *Any good father, if his son asked for bread, wouldn’t give him a rock. If he asked for meat, he wouldn’t give him a snake.* He taught us, therefore, that God would give the Holy Spirit to us if we asked. If we asked, God would not lie. He would do it. He also said that our receiving of the Holy Spirit would give us the power to die to ourselves. That part was especially good news to my ears.

I didn’t learn much else during that hour and a half of his Bible teaching but when he finished I knew that God doesn’t lie. If you had asked me before that evening if I thought God lied, I would have told you, “Of course not.” I would have known that in my intellect. It was something I had always been raised to believe, that God didn’t lie; *but now* *I knew through and through my soul that God did not lie.*

All of us went down the hallway to a little chapel. Graham and Earl stood at the front and asked if anyone wanted to have prayer for anything. Nancy and I were the first or second ones to raise our hands. We went to the front and knelt at the altar rail. Graham asked,

*“What do you want?”*

Basically being uninformed on spiritual things like that, all I knew to say was what I had said silently to the Lord on Saturday night. This time we said,

*“We want what you have. We want what you and Earl have.”*

And so they put their hands on us and prayed perhaps thirty or sixty seconds. They prayed that God would give us what they had. I don’t know exactly how they worded it nor do I recall any religious terms used, but when they had finished praying for us we went back to our seats. There were no tingles, no voices, no feelings, no nothing -- except we *knew* that we had received what we had asked for. Period. No doubt. We received only by faith and in faith. Faith was also our evidence.

Sunday we went home. On Monday I was again in the office. To several of my patients, when I was through with the doctoring part of our visit, I would say something like,

*“God has really been alive to me lately. Can I pray for you?”*

Of course, my patients would always say, *“Sure, Doctor Eckert.”* I’d pray for them and God would do things in them, in their lives or in their bodies. I’d do that in the office, on house calls and at the hospital. If someone was sick, I’d doctor them and ask if I could pray for them. Again, they’d say “sure.” After prayer I wouldn’t try to convince them they were well, but if the Lord had done something they would be quick to tell me.

In the next several weeks and months I had a couple of pastors who came to my office to talk to me, inviting me with fairly strong language to stick to my doctoring and they would do the preaching. My patients, being members of their flocks, were asking for more teaching about healing. That put the pastors and my patients on the spot. If the pastors had believed in God’s healing they would have already been teaching it.

There was one particular family in which the Lord did wonderful things. Jim and Beverly had two little girls. As their family physician I knew them as a family, but I didn’t know that Jim was an atheist, a really *firm* atheist. He had forbidden his family to have anything to do with God, not to mention God, nothing religious at all, etc., etc. Beverly, who had been a practicing believer before she married Jim, had to be quiet about anything about God.

First, Beverly brought in one of the little girls who had a bladder infection. She had a little fever, tenderness over her bladder, painful urination, and her urine test showed that her urine was full of pus. Very easy, straight forward diagnosis of cystitis [bladder infection]. So I made the diagnosis and wrote out a prescription for an antibiotic. I told Beverly and her daughter that I’d like to pray for her and asked if it was all right. Beverly said, *“Sure.” M*y prayers for healing were right to the point and still are. They last about 30 seconds. God does not have to be informed about very much, and if I am walking with Him I don’t have to get straight with Him before asking for His help. I asked the Lord to heal this little girl. When I was through talking with the Lord the girl proclaimed,

*“Mama, Mama, I’m well, I’m well!!”*

She wouldn’t have been persuaded to take her medicine. She was also convincing us that she was well. So we re-ran the urine test and it was clear. Perfectly normal. No more tenderness over her bladder and no more fever. *She was well*. She went from being proven ill to proven medically well in less than 30 minutes.

Not long after that, Jim came in with the other girl. I have to tell you something about Jim. Jim worked as a steel worker. He put up the steel for the buildings before anything else went up. He worked way up there with nothing but a steel girder to walk on. He had good balance and was a healthy, muscular guy. But one day Jim fell. It just so happened that at that moment he was working 3 feet off the ground on a wooden platform. The wooden platform gave way. He fell, hitting his head. His balance mechanism was damaged. Over the subsequent weeks and months, I had him seen by a neurosurgeon and a neurologist. They verified the diagnosis and said it was likely a permanent condition, which was considerably incapacitating to a guy in Jim’s occupation. Even when walking on the ground, he had to put his hand on someone’s shoulder before he could walk. His balance had to come from other than within himself. When he walked down the hall, he would slide his hand along the wall to keep his balance. He couldn’t drive a car because he would end up in the ditch!

So, one day Jim brought in the other little girl and I treated her. I probably prayed with her, I don’t remember. But as they were leaving, I said to Jim as we shook hands,

*“God bless you, Jim”.*

And they left. Jim left with his hand on his daughter’s shoulder as they walked out. A couple of weeks, maybe 10 days later, Jim called me. He said,

*“Dr Eckert, I just wanted to tell you that Jesus healed me.”*

I used to think that he was healed when I shook his hand and blessed him, but I had occasion to ask him about that years after the incident. He told me it was soon after that office visit. I don’t know how long it took, but *“God bless you, Jim”* was the shortest sermon on healing and salvation I have ever witnessed. I imagine it was the shortest one anyone ever preached, because when Jesus healed Jim He revealed Himself to Jim. *“God bless you, Jim”* is about as short as *“Jesus loves you.”*

I asked Jim later why it took so long for him to tell me that he was well. He confessed. Jim said,

*“I had a big lawsuit pending against the company for this injury, a permanent disability for the rest of my life. I had to deal with losing all that money. When I decided I’d rather be well than have that money, I just had to call and tell you.”*

He was in his 30’s at that point. He did lose the money and he stayed well, too. He went back to work and he, Beverly and the girls walked with the Lord from then on. They lived very dedicated, peaceful and loving lives. Preachers had been going to Jim for years trying to get him to come to his senses about the Lord. He would take their Bible, in which they had been showing him some verses, and thumb through it to find certain passages. Jim knew the Bible and used it to shame preachers*. He would point to certain verses and ask, “Do these things go on in your church? Has anything ever happened like this in your church?”* Then he would thumb over to another place and ask, *“How long has it been since you’ve seen anything like that?” “*Long time” or “never” were common responses.He would deliberately shame them. But suddenly, in faith Jim leapt past them. He believed the whole book and he began to see the whole book at work in his life. What kind of things had he been pointing to? Healings, spiritual gifts, manifestations of God’s presence and power -- things that are in the Bible.

(Nancy)

In my background I knew that it was the right thing to pray, but I never really had *seen* a visible answer to prayer. I didn’t really doubt them. I thought they probably happened somewhere. That first night when we were in the church chapel we had asked for prayer. Before we left that evening Bob said,

*“You remember Jeff, that drug company representative who was in my office last week? He was trying to borrow some money and I just put him off. I think he really has some kind of problem. He’s in trouble.”*

“Well, he lives in Houston and that’s where we are. Why don’t we see if we can contact him” I said.

We got on the phone and talked to his landlord, who asked us to let him know if we found Jeff because he had skipped out on the rent and the police were looking for him, also. Boy, he was in trouble. We didn’t know how to contact Him. The only thing we could do was pray for him. So we did.

Within a week Jeff was at our front door. God really got my attention on how He can act-out or flesh-out His answers to our prayers. We invited him in. When he asked for money we said,

*“No, but we will give you a place to stay. Come stay with us for awhile.”*

He thought about how it was a little town out in the country and seemed to be a good place to hide, so he decided to stay. And of course, we took him to church with us. That was it. He jumped straight into the Lord’s Life. Full steam. He got right with the law by spending a little time in jail. Then he became part of the church community and started a new life.

On the afternoon of the first day that we took him to church with us, Jeff noticed that a poisonous snake had been on the patio where the kids had been safely playing. He had already been hearing from us about God being alive and real. His testimony is that when he saw the copperhead near the children, but the children were safe, he knew God was real. That nailed down for him that God was real. When Jeff asked for prayer he was in the Boat.

Part Two

*(Events of medical practice in Galveston Co after the Lord moved into our lives)*

When the Lord moved into Nancy’s life it was not dramatic. She was already graceful, loving and faithful. I was the one who flipped like Saul becoming Paul. One day when I was working at the office an elderly moderately overweight lady walked in. She told the receptionist she wanted to see me as a person not as a doctor. She said she was from Corpus Christi and that her daughter and son-in-law and their kids were patients of mine. I recognized them by name. She said she had come to patch things up with them. Years before, she had left the family and gone off into a life of deep sin. Some years previous to her coming to see me, she had turned back to the Lord and had tried to get in contact with the family but they wouldn’t have anything to do with her. She had no response from them at all. I don’t know how she knew I was their doctor. She asked me if I would help her. At that time we had already, probably for a month or two, started a weekly evening Bible Study at our house and I was the main teacher. I didn’t tell her that her daughter and son-in-law were regular attendees of the Bible Study. I said I would help her*.*

*“Would you be able to come to my house tonight at about 6:00?”*

She did not know that the Bible study was at 7:00. She said she would be there. At 6:00, there she was. We two sat together on the couch in our living room. It was a big living room with the front door across from the couch. A coffee table was in front of us. We visited awhile, and before 7:00 the door bell rang. I knew it would be someone for the Bible Study and as God would have it, it was her daughter, by herself. As soon as I opened the door they saw each other.

The daughter said, *“MAMA!”* and lunged into the room and the Mama said, *“BABY!”* and hopped across the coffee table. They met in the middle of the living room just hugging each other. They sat on the couch throughout the Bible Study arm in arm. Afterwards, Mama went home with her daughter. About ten days later I got a call from the son-in-law, “Baby’s” husband. He said,

*“Dr. Eckert, ‘praise the Lord!’ God is so-o-o good.”*

I figured he had something going on and I said, *“Praise the Lord! Yes, God is so good!”*

*“Dr Eckert, you know Mama has been here with us. Tonight we had a dinner with the family. We gathered relatives from all around the area. We had them all over here to the house for dinner. Then we got up from the dinner table and went into the living room to visit. Mama sat on the couch and she just fell over dead; just leaned over dead.”*

He wasn’t heartbroken. He wasn’t expressing any form of grief. Some sadness perhaps, but not grief. That’s the way the whole family was because they saw God’s hand, the timing and everything. They all *knew* it was God’s perfect plan, fulfilled.

I saw God doing that kind of thing in my medical practice. We lived in Galveston County about 50 miles from Graham and his church in Houston, *Church of the Redeemer.* It was on the south part of the inner city of Houston and was freeway driving all the way. I began to visit with Graham. In our minds, we had just been plucked out of hell on earth and plunged into LIFE in the Lord. It was a “now what” kind of feeling. We were newborns and had both desire and need for getting together.

As God had arranged it, gradually over a month or so we came into contact with three other men and their families. The Lord had done the same thing to all five of us. One was an attorney in Galveston, another was an engineer in Pasadena, and the other was a Houston Lighting & Power Company lineman crew chief already living in Houston who had been attending the Redeemer for some years. These three guys had been moved upon by the Lord just like we had been moved on by the Lord. They also had little or no understanding of just exactly what had happened, or certainly not what they were to do about it. We recognized a commonality in God and began to realize that we were not going to limit God in whatever He wanted. That limitless would be guided prominently by Scripture. Also over the months that followed, we grew in our experience of hearing the Lord. We knew that God talked, that God did things, dramatic things, whatever He wanted to do and we had fallen into His hands. We had been plunged into Him.

We began to get together; actually to gravitate together. As the months went by we got together daily, and then often twice a day. Sometimes we met three times a day, before work, at noon, and in the evening. According to my ability to get off from my responsibilities, I would make that one hour trip, be together and have fellowship. We did *some* praying, but I would venture to say that we didn’t pray a whole lot because we knew we were alive to the Lord by the Spirit and Him to us 24/7. He was alive among us and we were listening and talking to Him, so we didn’t have to “stop and talk” formally to Him that much. We knew His presence. I hope I have explained that adequately without demeaning that which is commonly called prayer. If you have Him with you, sitting with you, driving and working with you, it’s not necessary to take time out from full-time fellowship to talk with Him. He’s part of the conversation, continually part of your ongoing life. Perhaps it would be good to say that our lives were alive to prayer continually with the Lord. We 5 were melded with each other.

Sometimes I would get up in the morning and by 6:00 A.M. would be at Graham’s house next to the church. We would be together for an hour or hour and a half. Then I would zip back down the freeway and go to work. At noon I would leave work and be back in two or two and a half hours. We’d meet again in the evenings. Some of us had teenaged kids by then. I didn’t, but some of the other guys did. And God had moved on our families, too. Since our families, mainly our wives, felt left out, we devised a time on Thursday or Friday nights when we got together as a large family. Certainly on weekends, as much as possible, we spent more and more time together.

Our lives had the same direction, the same commitment. It didn’t take too long before we realized that we were being drawn together, to live closer together without all the traveling back & forth and without the daily exclusion of our families. We began to talk about moving closer together and the word among us was, *“Don’t do it unless the Lord says so.”* There was no doubt about the Lord being able to tell us. It was easy for us to all agree to*, “Unless the Lord says so.”* One night, Nancy and I were in bed asleep. Suddenly we both sat up and looked at each other. We both realized the Lord had just told us,

*“Move to Houston.”*

So we planned for the move as soon as school was out in the Spring, and we did.

Part Three

I would say that the mark on our lives that would enable us to be formed into a church community was the simplicity of Christ, simplicity of loving, simplicity of working, simplicity of worship, the simplicity of all of life. The more that you boil life down to its essence it becomes more and more simple, not more and more complex. Only more and more simple.

Even our travels back and forth, up and down that highway, were easy for us. It was simple. For example, we didn’t seem to need as much sleep at times.

Nancy: The Lord drew a few people around us where we lived there in Galveston County. They commuted back and forth with us. Part of the travel game seemed to be a contest about how many people we could pack into our car.

One of things I remember about those who traveled with us, whether they were from the Bible Study, from my office staff or from my medical practice was that we were all becoming really close. One couple had five daughters, another family had five sons, and we had five sons. No, we did not all get into our car. The family that had five daughters came out of lots of life’s problems. Their daughters were little girls but the mother and father had lots of inadequacy. They came alive to the Lord and thus related closely with us. They were talking about what church they should join. I told them to *“Ask the Lord. He’ll tell you.” T*hey did and He did. He told them to join the Catholic Church -- the local Catholic Church. They joined and we were Godparents at the baptism of the kids. When I told our Pentecostal, evangelical Bible teacher, Earl, what had happened, he said*, “You let them join the Catholic Church?!”* Suddenly, but only briefly, I felt there may have been something wrong in my counsel, although I had found nothing wrong with what God had done. We were looking at it from different experiences and attitudes. Since I first began walking with the Lord, I have never been divisive denominationally. I think the Lord is free from that, also. I have advised people to go to a particular different local church if their current church did not have the spiritual strength or type of ministry that they needed at a time in their or their family’s lives, perhaps to return to their original church later.

So they had joined the Catholic Church. Those two families, each with five children, moved soon after we moved to Houston. Another family, Jim and Beverly, who had the two little girls, continued commuting.

I think that, looking at the pattern of my life and looking at Scripture, one of the Lord’s primary activities is to form community, meaning He draws us closer and closer to others. Whatever you want to call the end result, God forms a body, His body. When there is Life or Light, He has prepared people to respond to the Light. In that light people will lay down their lives for Him and for one another. As is said in 1 John 1:7, *“If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another.”* And Jesus Christ is the Light. Our fellowship came into being because of Jesus, the Light. It wasn’t a personality cult. The Holy Spirit bypassed personalities, social levels, religious denominations, etc. when He put us together. We had been remarkably unloaded in our souls and He was remolding and refilling us His way.

When school was out we moved about two blocks from the church in Houston. Over the next year or so, the other three men also moved their families to the neighborhood. Others began to join us in our commitment, unity and neighborhood. We easily began to have a common life of involvements and helping each other. We all owned our own houses, had our own bank accounts, and the usual personal and family responsibilities, but we didn’t consider the things we had as something that belonged to “me” to the exclusion of another person because all was His and it was available to God. All was His and we were stewards.

When we moved to Houston the question was, *“What was I going to do? Was I going to continue working as a doctor or do something else?”*  Because everything of life had opened to us, everything was up to Him. Whatever He wanted was exactly what we wanted. After about a month I became adequately assured by the Lord and by counsel and fellowship among us [the five brothers] that the Lord wanted me to go back into medical practice, and in the area.

I heard of a medical clinic that was nearby, near the docks of Port Houston. The area was very busy and generally rundown. At the clinic were 4 full-time doctors. I was readily received. The clinic had two stories, the second story being a hospital. Clinics, laboratory, X-Ray and business offices were on the first floor. I worked there for 3 years while the Lord showed me what kind of a son He wanted me to be… a son who did doctoring. That means He began to deliver me of “being” a doctor and into being a son who doctored. *“I was a farm boy who had made good”* and an important thing to me had been that *“I was a doctor!”* The Lord delivered me of that. Being His son was a very adequate identity and personage. I didn’t have to be something or someone else. I was His son and He wanted me to do doctoring.

So while there that new identity developed in me. He then showed me what kind of medical practice and patient relationships He wanted to develop in me. He confirmed for me that He would hand-pick my patients. No one could come to see me that He didn’t especially pick and everybody who came were those He wanted*.* And, He wanted me to relate to each as my family. I had to work that out as to how that would be as “family.” It was one thing to have a warm, personal, family relationship with my patients, but what about the financial aspect? Would I charge and require payment for medical services of my mother or father? What of the financial aspect of being God’s son who doctored?

I noticed that some of my patients could not afford to come back for followup. At that clinic the patients had to pay for their office visit before they could see their doctor. I would find that some of them didn’t have the money and therefore couldn’t get in to see me on their subsequent visits. So I made an arrangement with the business office that if any of my patients came in and didn’t have the money to see me, the business office was to take that cost out of my monthly check, which was a check based only upon a percent of the money collected for the work I did. I wasn’t on a salary. So this special arrangement let the patients see me and meant that God’s choices were getting their medical care. Then I became aware that some couldn’t pay for their laboratory tests or their x-ray. I made the same arrangement with the business office. When some patients returned on follow-up I found that they had not gotten all or any of their medicines from their pharmacy. There were two pharmacies across the street from the clinic so I arranged with those pharmacists to bill me every month when my patients came in and didn’t have the money to pay for their medicines.

My patients were getting their medical care. We five were family doctors. It was a privilege to practice medicine with them. The clinic fees were kept low but all fees had to be paid in advance. In my case, I was delivering real family style medical care to my mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters.

A little aside: One day, while I was working in the clinic, I heard that a patient in the second floor hospital had died. I hustled up the stairs to see if I could help. It was a young boy who had just had an appendectomy, had been brought to his room, and had suddenly died. When I arrived at his room there were doctors and others in attendance, so I went further down the hall looking for the family. Perhaps I could be of some help to them. I came to the small waiting room where two adults [apparently the boy’s parents] and two young children were on their knees praying. They were crying, thanking the Lord for having had their son for his years with them. They were grieving and praising the Lord. What a testimony of love and faith!

Back at the church certain developments were underway, beginning within a few months after we moved there. Single men and single women were coming around. Once again we knew they were hand-picked by the Lord. He would bring them into our lives. Some were very crippled in their souls, others were well educated with good jobs in town, or from out of town. The already committed Christians wanted to move close by and be a vital part of what they saw God doing.

First, the five families of us would take them, the hungry healthy and the needy downtrodden, into our homes. They began laying down their lives like they saw us doing, living for the Lord like they saw us living, and offered themselves to us in the Lord for whatever we and He wanted. Ordinarily the pastor, Graham, knew what was going on in all the families, so he would assign each newcomers to live with a particular family. He would pray for the newcomers, then bring them to the house and introduce them. We’d take them in as family. If any of them had to be delivered spiritually, we’d pray for them. Their souls would be remade and refortified over the next few weeks and months.

Those dear ones became a part of our lives. They were fully family. Our little fellowship began to grow in numbers. Some who had been remarkably incapacitated needed something out of the house to do during the day, to relieve our wives of full-time watchfulness -- something that had spiritual value. One answer to that need came as John, who was the lineman crew chief for Houston Lighting and Power, was called by the Lord to quit his job just a few years before he could retire. When he retired early he lost his retirement money. But he resigned his job and went to work fulltime at the church, trusting the Lord to take care of him and his family financially. He had three teenagers. He became the daytime shepherd of those who were being rehabilitated. He would work with them all day long, pray with them, stop and have lunch at the church, counsel them and work some more. He shepherded them.

I took some of those saints to the office with me. Our second floor hospital had closed and we had all those empty rooms. I moved my office up from the first floor. First, I took a young lady who had been a lesbian and was living in one of our households. I taught her the simple things of being a medical assistant, particularly of helping with female patients. She did great. I didn’t expect much of her besides being nice and doing simple things as I showed them to her. As we moved upstairs, I needed my own receptionist. One was an ex-schizophrenic whom the Lord had delivered. He had been a school teacher. He abounded in love and servanthood, and became an excellent receptionist. Then I needed a janitor, too. You know, I didn’t really *need* these people but truly I could use them. My staff gradually grew. My third helper had also been a schizophrenic. He was my maintenance man and janitor. He didn’t have a lot to do, but he puttered around and had fellowship with the patients in our little private waiting room.

And then a girl came in through my practice. She was pregnant and single at age 17. As my patient, I had offered her a whole new life if she wanted to lay down her life and live for the Lord. If she wanted that she could come home with me and live with my family and me as family. She took us up on it. She came home with me, I delivered her, and she adopted-out her baby. She began to be taught by a highly experienced lab technologist who was attending the church and had entered into our fellowship. She was taught to do simple lab tests as part of my growing staff at the clinic.

At the end of my being at the clinic for about three years, and being significantly changed as God’s son who did some doctoring, a major change was about to occur. One of the healthy saints who had come into the church was an Episcopal minister. He had gotten a job as a social worker in Houston and began to be impressed with a certain area of town called the Fourth Ward. Early in Houston’s history, instead of precincts the city’s political divisions were called wards. The Fourth Ward was probably the most concentrated poverty area of Houston. The priest-social worker was impressed that the Lord was offering the church a ministry there. He didn’t know what it was, but I learned something new about myself in this process. As that brother told us about the Fourth Ward and his sense of our being called there, my soul was filled with negativity. I felt, *“I’m sure I don’t have anything to do with it, and the church probably doesn’t, either.”*

I think it was the next day that I found myself in the Fourth Ward looking for a place to start a medical clinic. The Fourth Ward had lost its local, city medical facility although free or low-cost medical care was available a considerable distance away. Local residents had to catch a bus and ride half way across Houston. So indeed there was a need that matched our brother’s sense of our calling.

We found a place. I located there in the Fourth Ward in a fairly small storefront. I went down the street to do business with the insurance and rental agency man who owned it. We talked about it for awhile and, of course, he wanted to know what we were going to do with it. I told him that the Lord had need of it, which prompted him to relate some of his life and experiences with the Lord.

For example, in WW I, he had been a captain in the infantry in France. He and his men were camped and asleep on a hillside. He said God woke him up and said, *“Move out!” He said, “I got my men up and going and told them ‘God said to move out.’ Some of the men moved out and some didn’t. No sooner did we get up and move that the German shells began to fall in that area and killed some of the soldiers who would not move out.”*

He shared that freely with me. The next day I had gathered enough money to start renting the building. I went back to his office to pay him. He wasn’t there. Instead, his adult son who was in business with him was at the office. So, I started visiting with the son. I mentioned that his father sure had some good experiences with the Lord.

He said, *“Oh?”*

“Yes, you know, about the shelling in France.”

*“Oh, really?”*

That son did not know his father’s testimony. It was surprising and saddening, and probably a motivation to me to not hide God’s glory when He had revealed it in my own life. That has not been one of my faults -- “hiding my testimony.”

So in 1967, four years after the Lord moved into our lives, I started the clinic in the Fourth Ward. I already had my initial staff so we just got into the building and cleaned up the dusty place as much as it would allow. There was a large, empty back room into which we put a large table for my lab tech to work on. The only thing she objected to was the rats that ran around in broad daylight, but she got accustomed to them. Every day the aforementioned highly capable laboratory technologist who worked in one of Houston’s large hospitals would come in and do certain tests that I had ordered and that my lab tech didn’t know how to do. She would teach her student tech more things as the weeks progressed. I still had my same receptionist. In fact, the only piece of furniture we had that first day at the clinic was a desk for him to stand behind. That was me and my crew, a receptionist, nurse, lab tech, janitor and my black bag.

As a small town country doctor, my black bag had been and still was well equipped. The first day that we opened we had three patients and I had everything in that black bag that those three patients needed. In a week our staff had grown to one LVN and several RN’s, all of whom were volunteers. We had a nurse every day. We were all volunteers! By the end of the week we had examining tables, chairs, and more lab equipment because the hospitals in town had heard of what was going on and wanted to be part of it. They opened their store rooms and gave us a free choice of their good, used equipment. In a week’s time we had been joined by another doctor part time, several nurses, and all of the furniture and equipment we needed – and lots of patients.

We were in that first location for only one year. That one doctor was faithful to come one-half day every week. He was a Non-Christian, an observant Jew. We had great fellowship. He was not bothered by our flow of Christianity, nor we by his lack of it. We included him in our prayer times. After one year we had almost as many professional and non-professional staff as we did patients per day. We needed a bigger place. I found a partly abandoned church that had neighborhood social services in the sanctuary part, but the Sunday School rooms were unused. I could see that they would be good for our clinic. We moved in. We were there for three years. Growth of staff and patients continued. We provided all of our patients’ medications so the Lord gave us a full-time registered pharmacist. After a year or two he was so busy that one day, he said,

*“I need some help in the pharmacy, Dr. Eckert!”*

“Well, Craig, let’s pray and ask God for that help.”

I think it was the next day that this hippie came in -- a druggie, an atheist. He wanted to be part of what was going on there. He saw what to him was a good work. I realized that he was our answer to prayer, and I told him so. That wasn’t an unusual thought because all who worked at the clinic were answers to prayer. I told him that we needed someone to work in the pharmacy, that he would be handling drugs all day, and that his life would need to be drug-free, not only while at work but his entire life 24/7. He said,

*“I’ll do that.”*

And he did. Charles was one of the most peaceful, faithful, and capable employees we had.

While we were there our laboratory staff grew to five people. That highly trained laboratory technologist, Shirley, was now full-time. We had lots of patients and my patients needed lots of care. I was still the only full-time doctor but we had several specialists who worked one-half day every week. We had a sign in the waiting room that said,

*“This is not a government clinic. You will not receive a bill. Please pay what you are willing and able.”*

Some had government health insurance, like Medicaid; some people paid some amount of cash, and a few were very capable and prosperous type people who came from outside our neighborhood to support us by their presence. They came also to receive medical care so they could support us financially.

All of our patients were not down and outers although a big majority of them were. I recall an Episcopal minister who was not engaged in things of the Spirit as much as we were. His wife was, however. She needed a daily IV infusion of a potentially toxic antibiotic, and she was pregnant. Her doctor wouldn’t give the medicine to her because of its possible ill-effect on her unborn child. She asked me if I would administer it at our clinic, so we talked it over and prayed. She understood the risk and her faith was real – not merely hopeful. Her faith was not based on what she knew the Lord could do, but on what she was assured He would do. Her husband understood the risk, respected her faithfulness, and allowed us to administer the medication. She came to the clinic and received it every day for 4 hours for several weeks. She delivered a perfectly normal baby.

She is exemplary of our patients who came to us from across town where they lived in prosperous surroundings and had access to class medical care, but came to our clinic because they were responsive to the Lord. But the big majority of our patients were poor and in generally unattended health.

Another important area of our growing clinic was the physical therapy department. Every department had only one small room, except the doctor-patient area which was three treatment rooms. The Physical Therapy Department had been a one-car garage attached to the church. We converted it into a Physical Therapy room because the Lord gave us a physical therapist and lots of equipment. We kept her busy all of the time. We didn’t have to worry about our patients being able to afford these things because we were serving them as unto the Lord as family. The Lord had impressed me adequately in my medical ministry that if I would serve Him without measure, He would take care of me and my family. That promise was found to apply also to others who joined us in service to Him and our patients.

And that was just exactly right. He was supplying people. Doctors in town with prestigious medical practices somehow heard of us. They came, they saw, and they asked to be fit into our ministry. They worked half a day every week. Most of the doctors were Jewish. I love Jewish doctors and Jewish people because they are so real. They are looking for the *real* thing and know it for what it is when they see it.

In that clinic, our second location, in the back of that old church, the Lord just kept adding well-qualified people, including doctors who wanted to work full-time, without salary. It soon became obvious that we again needed more space. I will tell you more about that later but first I want to tell you what God was building back at the Redeemer Church Community.

A financial incident that was very encouraging for a spiritual walk occurred during our first year in Houston. I had been receiving a monthly check from my accounts receivable from my previous medical practice in Galveston County. Those checks would stop after 12 months. One evening my accountant, who was doing my income tax, called me and said,

*“Bob, you need to hold onto some of that money. You are going to need it for your income taxes.”*

We were using some of that monthly check for ourselves but instead of saving it month by month we were giving it to people who needed it “now.” The Lord had already established the principle before we had moved to Houston that *“I should not keep for myself tomorrow that which my brother needs today.”*  So when I was getting a fairly large check every month from my accounts receivable, and I didn’t need that much, it went to those who did need it. We would give it to them. The tax accountant was saying that I should hold on to some of that money because soon I would have a lot of income tax to pay. At that time it was right near the end of those twelve months of income from accounts receivable. I knew that the small amount yet to be received wasn’t going to be enough to pay even a small income tax bill, and that we had very little cash. But I also knew that our present financial condition would not change the Lord’s promise or His ability to supply. We continued giving.

One night I was down the street visiting with a brother. He and his family had just begun a walk with the Lord, come into fellowship in the church, and had moved into the area to be part of God’s life with us. I was talking with and encouraging him. While I was counseling him, I could see that he was in a real press for about a $1000. I also knew that that amount was all I had and that at that point I didn’t expect more from the accounts receivable. I knew that $1000 would not be enough to satisfy my income taxes for the year, so I wrote him a check for $1000. When I got home that evening, my accountant called and said,

*“Bob, I don’t understand this…you’re supposed to owe a lot of money on your taxes. I’ve gone over it and gone over it three times and it keeps coming up the same. The government owes you money!”*

I have no idea what happened there except that the Lord did it. He took care of us in all kinds of ways. He took care of our health, our finances and whatever.

When the Lord had first moved into our lives while we were still living in Galveston County, every year I paid a lump sum on a life insurance policy covering me that was designed to take care of our two older sons’ future financial needs for college. It was during that time that the Lord taught me “if your brother has need now, how can you hold on to what you have just because you may need it in the future?”

There was a need made known to me and the money for that need went to that need. I had to cancel my policies for the kids’ college fund. As it turned out years later, our first son, Rob, didn’t want anything to do with college. He wasn’t college material. He was really good at mechanical things, electronic-type things. He didn’t want further education after he got out of public school so he joined the Navy. He did great in the Navy. Our second son, Kim, who was a year younger than Rob, was absolutely and still is the brain in the family. He worked his way through the University of Texas and graduated with honors in electrical engineering. We helped him a little bit but not much. He bought his own house and did tremendously. The Lord did know what each one was going to need and He supplied what they needed for their college education.

Meanwhile, back in the neighborhood of the church, we and the other more stable families among our growing community needed bigger and bigger houses to hold all the extra people. Some of those were spiritually and mentally prosperous saints, but some needed rehabilitation mentally and/or physically. I had some of the best chief stewards imaginable -- young men who needed no rehabilitation. They were college graduates and dedicated to the Lord and had come to live with us because they wanted more dedication. They saw us living Scripture and dove into life with us. Since I was often gone from home, which I will talk about later, the Lord gave me chief stewards who were major supports to Nancy and the household and to our family life.

Our first house was a really big house with big rooms, lots of rooms, two-story, and a three car garage. A judge had built it. When we bought it, we fixed it up really nice, moved into it, furnished it, and had been living in it for about a year when we visited a couple who lived closer to the docks than we did. That couple had 5 kids of their own and a whole bunch of other little kids, crib babies and older, whom they simply took in “off the streets.” They took the kids in because their parents had been sent to prison. This couple had the well-deserved reputation in the area with the people on the streets that if they let Essie and Basil take care of their kids while the parents were in prison, they could get them back when they got out. People trusted Essie and Basil, for good reason. They took kids in and loved them, without cost.

They had just come into fellowship with the church when Nancy and I visited their home. It was a little four room house with one bathroom. It was crowded with all those people in it. Their small yard had a chain link fence around it and there wasn’t any grass. It was all dirt from the kids playing in it. But it was clean and orderly even though it was all dirt. The kids played peacefully. The older kids loved and took care of the younger kids.

The husband’s, Basil’s, mother was in a hospital bed in one of the rooms. She was in a vegetative state. The wife, Essie, was an RN. She worked as a nurse in a hospital. They took care of Basil’s mother full-time in that bed. Basil slept on the floor underneath the dining room table. That was his regular place to sleep. They had sleeping room for him only there.

We saw the presence of God and the family’s response to God’s calling on their lives, and on the kids that they were raising to the Lord. On the way home we began talking about our visit. I said, “I think the Lord wants us to give them our home.” Of course I meant our big, well-fixed home. Nancy agreed. We offered them our home and in a few days they accepted it. They had to assume the house note. We made arrangements for a move-out date which meant we needed to find a place to live. We found a house that was adequate for the number of people we had living with us. I think we had a 21 member all-male household, except for Nancy. We gave Essie and Basil our home. The house we were moving into didn’t have any furniture in it. It might have had a range. We couldn’t picture ourselves moving our furniture out of the house we were giving away. They wouldn’t have had enough furniture to live properly so we arranged to leave all of our furnishings with them. There was one problem. We had a gas dryer and the house into which we were moving had only an electric dryer connection. But they had an electric dryer, so we swapped. Other than that, it was walk out of the house and give them the keys.

The day before we were scheduled to move into that house without any furniture, except the range, washer and dryer, we got a call from a spiritually mature sister in the church. She said she knew we had a three car garage and that she needed some furniture storage space. A young mother, who had been a scarlet lady, and her child had just moved in with her. The young lady needed a place to store her furniture. We told her we had a *wonderful* place to store her furniture, much better than the three-car garage. It was a three-bedroom house we were moving into, which matched perfectly with the three bedrooms of furniture she needed to put into storage! It happened that the dear young lady who let us store her furniture [permanently] became that top-notch lab technologist at our clinic.

I must tell you of my new Plymouth Fury which was stolen overnight while we were still living in that large house. One morning it was gone! First I thought that one of my close brothers had borrowed it, but a couple of phone calls soon disproved that hopeful thought. I knew, correctly, that it had been stolen. Paraphrasing: “When someone steals your coat, give them your shirt.” But how could I give them my shirt [keys and car title] when I had no idea who had taken my coat [the car]? Who better to help find them than the police? I reported it stolen. Three days later they found it abandoned overnight on a school yard, with tires, wheels and seats missing. I replaced the missing parts. That thief still has no idea that he could have had that car free and clear if he had come clean before God and man.

There’s no end to the individual, personal testimonies of people whom the Lord was adding to our church community and households. I remember that Kerry came visiting. I think maybe his brother and sister-in-law brought him. Kerry was a very smart man, a university graduate and a teacher. His problem was that he thought he was the fourth person of the Godhead. Christians know about the three Persons of the Trinity, but Kerry considered himself the fourth person of the “Quadrupy.” He wore his shirts backwards so that his collar would look like a clerical collar. When he heard the name of Jesus he would roar like a lion, writhe and thrash about. So Kerry was another of God’s gift. By that time, we knew that whomever the Lord sent was a gift and if we didn’t embrace that gift and grow in grace, tomorrow’s gifts would be impossible for us. But if we were embracing God’s gifts day by day, all of tomorrow’s gifts would be possible for us and the Lord.

Kerry came to live with us after first living with another household for a while. He was the brother who subsequently became my clinic receptionist. We would have to assign someone to Kerry in our church services because Jesus’ name was often mentioned. We would put someone on both sides of him to hold him down when Jesus’ name was spoken because the tormentor within might throw him over a row or two of pews! We also had special church services for Kerry. He not only got compassionate care but also intensive care. A group of 10 or 20 of us would go with him to the little chapel and sing and talk about Jesus. Kerry would roar and thrash. Over perhaps two months the Lord gradually delivered him. He became the most loveable and one of the most healthy and helpful saints that one could imagine. I was fortunate to have a lot of involvement with Kerry after that, in the clinic and in Mexico, which we will talk about later.

Reuben was schizophrenic also, and had grand mal epileptic seizures. Like Kerry, he became one of the most faithful, sweet saints in the church. The Lord never did heal him of his epilepsy. Reuben *still* has epilepsy and occasionally the seizures that accompany epilepsy, but he was so faithful! In the midst of people of palpable faith, the Lord healed him of his schizophrenia. For example, one family was remodeling a large house [our houses were usually large in order to accommodate large households], working on the sides, windows, and roof, using scaffolds. Reuben was part of the work crew. He would get right up there on the scaffolding and roof even though he was having one or two seizures a day. But he never had a seizure while on the roof or scaffolding. We could not understand why God never healed him of his seizures. I saw him last year and he still has occasional seizures.

The makeup of our households would shift from time to time. Some people were with us for years in one household. The makeup of households would change according to their ministries, because ministries were expressions of the life in each household. Very special ministry households might be formed. Some households would be of women and some of men. We were receiving people into community life who were solid spiritual people and were ready for whatever the Lord wanted. The Lord made us flexible. It seems that one of the listed fruit of the Spirit should have been flexibility.

Nuclear family relationships were stressed, as were all relationships. Stresses showed weaknesses for the purpose of their becoming strengths. Each family had its own blessings and troubles. We worked together to pass our family tests, as we also worked together in our ministries. The church had a top notch Boy Scout leader who did wonderful and enjoyable things with our sons and neighborhood kids. Another son was in the boys’ choir and was able to visit and sing at Cambridge, England. Another traveled with us to Mexico [yes, more later about Mexico] and worked in our clinic there. Nevertheless, we parents and our kids were not perfect. In my case, the rough edged relationships with some of my five sons were not smoothed until they became adults. The Lord worked those things for our mutual good as I was given time to become a better person, husband and father, and my sons had their opportunities for walking in their own adulthood, husbandship and fatherhood.

So there are hundreds of personal testimonies, with many still processing. Cindy was a rebellious mid-teenager. Her mother and father had just plunged into the Lord’s life and were in close fellowship with us. Cindy came to live with us to “get straightened out.” She was an immediate blessing and support to our family as she dived into the Lord. She was also Nancy’s tremendous disciple, household helper and babysitter. Cindy became a vivacious, faithful lady and sister. We are still in contact with her. She now lives in Colorado.

Those kinds of relationships are permanent. The chief steward in one of my households lived with us for about two years. Sometimes I would be gone for weeks. As a recent college graduate he did a great job of running the household, supporting Nancy, and supervising the young boys in the house. I had not seen him for perhaps 30 years when, a few years ago, he called. Our hearts just took up from where they had left off years previously. He told me that just a couple days earlier his wife had been away vacationing when the house she was in blew up from a gas leak. She and another lady with whom she had been vacationing were killed. He said he was currently being loved on and ministered to by his adult kids, pastor and others, but he said,

*“I just need to talk to somebody that I know loves me just because they love me, not because they have to as pastor or as family. I need to talk to you.”*

He spent a couple of days with us. Those were the kind of relationships that were deep – God’s family relationships. They never change, except to get better.

PART 5

We were in the storefront for a year and in an abandoned church for three years. The clinic kept growing in numbers of patients, doctors and other medical personnel who wanted to be a part of that which God was doing. It was time for us to move again into a larger facility.

Parallel to that need there was another dynamic going on. We had voluntarily become part of a neighborhood group. We had given the clinic and ourselves to a group gathered out of the neighborhood, all blacks. Things went quiet well for a year or so, but in subsequent neighborhood elections the composition of the board changed from those who were brotherly and knowledgeable of our calling to those who had a high level of suspicion that we folks, who were working so hard and seeing many patients, were making lots of money. Our relationship only got worse as we testified to our calling to lay down our lives at any cost, serving the Lord and our patients. They suspected us of being scoundrels. We were accused of making lots of money, when actually we were putting ourselves and our own money into the clinic.

We were white. Practically all of “us” were white. Because of the potential for a racial division I had intentionally taken a nurse and a receptionist out of the neighborhood, both of whom were black. As expected, the love of God among us rehabilitated the alcoholic nurse as she worked with us. But those two were cowed by the new leadership group and couldn’t bring themselves to speak up for us. I didn’t ask them to. They knew the truth but their souls couldn’t match the hostility and suspicion of the others. It was time for a separation from the neighborhood board, and we had outgrown that building.

There on the edge of this 8 by 10 block area, which was the heart of the Fourth Ward, was an abandoned Weingarten Supermarket. It was a big building that had been abandoned by Weingarten’s because it had been often robbed at gun point. Management finally decided to close this store because it was dangerous for their employees and I suppose also losing money. It had been sitting empty for about two years. Now we were ready for it. The large part of the store was the big open area and was all cleared out. About a fourth of the store was storerooms and offices which we could immediately use while we made real facilities of the larger space.

I went to Weingarten’s realty. We never had any large amount of money and that day was no exception. We always had what we needed but we couldn’t show any money on hand. I talked to Ed, the President of Weingarten’s realty, a really fine person. I told him who we were, what we had been doing, what we had and what we wanted. He asked some questions and I explained further for him. He got a really good picture of what was going on -- a faith organization, a sacrificial organization, and a very Christian organization. Ed and the owners were Jews. He understood and appreciated everything I said. His questions and responses showed me that he really understood. Finally he said,

*“How are you going to pay for renting the store and all the utilities?”*

I just told him the truth, “My Father owns all the cattle on a thousand hills!”

He recognized that as right out of the Psalms and said, *“Just a minute,”* getting up and leaving the room for perhaps 10 minutes. When he came back he said, *“It’s a deal.”* I had asked him for three favors which would cost them nothing: Secure the building with metal doors and good strong locks, whatever the air conditioning needed to have done for it to be in good working condition, and the first three months free rent. They could make up those costs and the rent after those three months passed. So we weren’t asking for anything big time. The arrangement was fine with them. They did all that we requested. Then came the day that we moved out of our little church building into that large supermarket. We moved out only that which was ours personally and opened up the next morning in the new location.

We continued growing. We were seeing 1200 patients a month and it grew to 1500-1700 patients a month. Loads of employees…a few of them made $100 monthly because they just had to have money for bus fare and life’s incidentals. There were a dozen part time doctors, most of them faithful Jews, who came in every week for a half day when they were out of their offices, seeing patients according to their medical specialties.

By necessity I worked full time for nothing. There was another doctor who did also. He was young, single and supported himself by working some nights as an emergency room doctor and with us full-time during the day. We also had an ex-missionary physician in his 40’s who was a hand surgeon. He worked full-time seeing general patients. When he had been on the mission field he had seen general patients. We had our optometrist, physical therapist, pharmacist, pharmacy technician as I mentioned before, a nurse practitioner and a big staff of capable and faithful nurses.

We were connected with the Nurse Practitioner’s School in Galveston so our nurse practitioner often had a student nurse practitioner working with her. Our optometrist trained optometry students from the University of Houston. I was on the staff of Baylor Medical School and trained students and residents from there, and from the University of Texas Medical School, both in Houston. We delivered good medical care amid the joy of relating to patients as family, God’s family. They came to the clinic and really enjoyed being part of our medical practice “style.” Our practice was a good, high level practice of medicine. We didn’t have all of the usual things and circumstances that private physicians must be concerned with. Financial costs to the patients were one of those otherwise necessary considerations.

The financial cost of our care would have been out of reach of most of our patients. They could never have afforded that kind of medical care. Perhaps they also experienced something else new – the very personal relationships with clinic personnel. We cared for them very personally. It was common for a child to be brought in with impetigo -- multiple sores. It was the cycle of no screens, mosquito bites, itching, scratching, and sores. We would not only treat their skin problems but our maintenance personnel would go home with them and put screens on their windows and screen doors. They were our family. The relationship that God had told me years before, that He wanted me to be family with my patients, was effective to the changing of our and their souls. They treated us them as family, too.

A number of us moved into the Fourth Ward area. Nancy and I found an abandoned two-story hotel. I don’t want you to get the idea that everything we moved into was abandoned, but some of it was. We redeemed our abandoned buildings so I suppose you could say our Redeemer sent us from the Redeemer to redeem the unredeemed. We saw potential in most things. The hotel was a frame building with 20-30 rooms. We rented it for very little. Nancy and I, with our newborn fifth son and our other four, moved into the Bluebird Hotel. So did another lady and her young son. So did another brother who was a Methodist minister and counselor at the clinic, with his wife and child. We still had lots of empty rooms! We were the Bluebird Hotel. One day a friend who was a local fireman visited us. He walked in saying, “About two and a half minutes, that’s how fast this place could go. With all this framing and wallpaper, in about two minutes it would all be gone!” He knew how fast old wooden buildings would burn. Not long after that he could leave his fear for our safety behind when he became a White House Secret Service agent.

Right there in that jammed-in neighborhood, the two lane, rutted streets were only two lanes. If a car was parked somewhere, the street became one lane. Most all the houses were very rundown. The people didn’t own them and the people who did own them didn’t keep them repaired.

But we made lots of friends. Many were our patients but some were not. We made friends because they and we were friendly. The couple who lived across the street was fine people, she a social worker and he a church pastor. Of all those in the neighborhood, we were the only whites. That did not seem to bother anyone, except the Black Panthers. But that is another story for a bit later.

I waned to get acquainted with the pharmacist who had his pharmacy there on the edge of the Fourth Ward. I walked in and noticed that there were a number of junior high and high school boys lined up at the counter and that they were getting their daily “legal” purchase of two ounces of paregoric, a common oral liquid narcotic. They may have been signing for it more than once daily, I don’t know. But when I walked in, since I was a stranger, there was a lot of pulling their heads down into their shoulders like, “don’t recognize me.” The pharmacist did likewise.

We also got acquainted with a local character known as “the Wolf Man.” I had been hearing a howling like a wolf but had ignored it. Our neighbors across the street started telling us, actually warning us, about the wolf man:

*“Don’t have anything to do with him. He’s a mean guy!”*

When I heard that I said to myself, “I need to meet this guy. I love him already!” So the next time I heard the howling I walked out into the street. I saw him coming from a couple of blocks away. I just stood there and he kept coming and howling. People, adults and kids, all ran into their houses. Any time he came, they ran! He walked right up to me. I held out my hand and we shook hands like old friends. I visited with him a little bit, genuinely loved him from my heart all the time, then blessed him and prayed for him. He was very friendly and conversive! Nancy watched from the window as I greeted him peacefully until he went away without howling. He never howled again. Thereby we lost some of our neighborhood color. No more “wolf man” and no more howling! I guess he could have moved to some other neighborhood but he never howled again in our neighborhood. The power of God is available to deliver – first us, then others.

Our main waiting room, where people entered the clinic, would seat about 30 people. We seated them on church pews. We may have had a couple of folding chairs, but mostly we had church pews for our seating in the waiting room, plus a big receptionist counter for our three receptionists. One of our receptionists was an Episcopal minister. Every “job” was a Spirit-filled ministry. Every department had its own sub-waiting area. All of the waiting areas were social communities. Some people would come to just sit. [We were peaceful and air conditioned.] This lady, who was a patient, would occasionally come and sit for awhile. Somebody on the staff would eventually say, *“Mrs. Whatever, do you need to see the doctor today?”* She would say*, “No, I just came to be ‘round y’all.”* We loved her and God was there manifesting Himself.

Of course, just as had happened to Weingarten’s when it was a supermarket, we were robbed. First, while we were working on the clinic, getting the large open area ready to open, the clinic was vandalized. First they came through the roof and vandalized the lab, breaking up the stethoscopes and so forth. After that, two of us men would sleep there at night, and it stopped. But we were also robbed twice, in broad daylight, the robbers coming in through the main door, with guns drawn. The reason I mention that particular trial/ministry opportunity is that the Black Panthers were in the neighborhood for both good and bad effect. Their story relates to our vandalizations and robberies, and I have already promised you “The Black Panther Story.”

When the Panthers came to Houston, they didn’t come into the Fourth Ward. They came into the Fifth Ward which is near the University of Houston across the Southwest Freeway from our home church, the Church of the Redeemer -- Episcopal. [You have noticed that all my story has been first-hand accounts. This part is a daily second-hand account from reliable others as given to me as it occurred.] Recently the Panthers had taken over a seven or eight blocks square area of the Fifth Ward. They really took it over! They were easily seen walking up and down the streets carrying guns. They headquartered there. Wisely, the police initially backed off to avoid an armed confrontation. It would have been absolute war. Instead, the police planned something else. They placed a sniper in the bell tower of an abandoned church and started a ruckus on the street. When the leaders of the Panthers came running out of their building, the sniper shot and killed the Panther leader.

That cooled things off for awhile. They apparently realized that they were not going to be able to take over that way, so they moved to the Fourth Ward where we were already living. They chose a house in which they lived and had their headquarters. That house was about three feet from one of the houses where some of our people lived. There were about eight people living in what I will call OUR house. The big thing that the Panthers had said over and over was that blacks and whites could never live together because the white people would always try to dominate. They used that saying in an effort to separate blacks from whites so the blacks could progress independently. I could see that there was some truth in their words. Having had some adult years before the beginning of racial integration of American society, I knew that in some ways the blacks had a better life when they had their own society. For example, they had many of their own and successful businesses, a social order that was more healthy in ways than was the whites, and family unity of father and mother and children. So, racial integration both helped and hurt the black community. But, the Panthers moved right next door to one of our houses.

That house of “our” clinic workers was headed up by a black couple with a baby. Completing the household were six male and female adults, of whom 5 were white and one, a very graceful lady, who was black. All six worked at the clinic. That’s how we had to live because of the financial effect of our life’s calling. We all lived in community whether the community was at home, at work, or at church. We lived in such a way that we could devote full-time and full resources to that which and those whom the Lord called us. Those who lived in households and had regular jobs supported the household with their income. In fact, the black man who headed up this house was a music professor at one of Houston’s universities.

Because he was the head of a household that had white people in it, and the Panthers got to know them personally, their mantra was blown away. Here they lived right next door to something that was a living contradiction to that which they were saying to everyone. People could see it! Whites were living as family with and under the household headship of blacks. Our lives were very public in that neighborhood, so this did not escape the attention of anyone. It certainly affected the Panthers.

Here is another [half-] compliment to the Panthers. They did some good stuff. They fed breakfast to neighborhood kids before school in the morning, but they extorted the food from the local grocery stores. They didn’t do anything entirely right and didn’t do everything entirely wrong.

The Panthers had an old station wagon that they used to give neighborhood people a ride to places, like to our clinic. Gradually the Panthers learned what we were doing. They learned of our family-type relationships with our patients and they found out about our medical bills payment method. They saw that sign in the waiting room that said,

*“This is a private clinic, not a government clinic. You will not receive a bill. Please pay what you are willing and able.”*

They saw all of that and it didn’t make sense according to their experience and life outlook. It was easy for the Panthers to become objects of determined fellowship on our part, and of our prayers.

One day their car broke down, and died. It was entirely and finally dead! When we heard of it, one of our counselors/receptionists became inspired. He was a Catholic priest whose bishop had him released to work with us full-time. He lived in community with us. He had a friend who was a car dealer. He got his friend to give us a really nice, late model station wagon with title and keys. He drove it to the clinic and we called the Panthers to come for a visit. They did not know why the invitation but they came over that afternoon. We gave them the car, the keys and the title. They knew that car was a better car than any of us were driving! They teared-up and expressed their deepest appreciation. We were never robbed again. We had effective protection. Neither were we again vandalized. There was peace for us in the Fourth Ward. This was peace joined with a fist, but ours was not the fist. We first gained favor with the Lord, then with the powers of the neighborhood.

We also gained favor from the mayor of Houston. I had some visits with him to let him know what we were doing. He helped us a bit with certain city regulations as we converted all of that big open shopping space into examining rooms, treatment rooms, storerooms, pharmacy and so forth. We had our full-time optometrist and full time dentist, both of whom worked without pay as did the medical doctors. We had a food pantry and clothing corner, besides the medicines for our patients, and sometimes we brought the patients home with us, or we would go home with the patients to help them with special problems.

Before I describe more of our patient encounters, let me say that one of our clinic employees, an Episcopal minister with family, began looking around the edges of the Fourth Ward for more places for us to live. He looked within a 5 block radius. He found a little cul-de-sac of big old mansions, about a half dozen of them, that were all fixed up and very different from anything else in the Fourth Ward including elsewhere around its margin. While driving through the small area admiring the homes he saw a man working in one of the yards. He stopped to visit with him. When he asked the yardman about the houses he said*,*

*“A foundation bought up all these mansions and put them in good shape. I’m the attorney that is heading up the foundation. We’re looking for somebody to live in them so they will be safe and not be rundown.”*

Bob, our Episcopal minister, said, “I just happened to be looking for a place like that.” We started moving into them. My family and household moved into a big one. They were all big. Rent was $1.00 each house per year. We did pay our own utilities and took care of the property.

God intervened like that many times, as I told you about the pharmacy assistant. The pharmacist had needed some help in the pharmacy, we prayed for a pharmacy assistant, and that day or the next, Charles, a drug user, was the answer to prayer. He was good at his work and always stayed off of drugs. His mother came in and expressed her deepest appreciation. Really, we had not done anything unusual.

God provided over and over. We never had much but we always had what we needed.

We got lots of notoriety; the good kind. The Chronicle, Houston’s biggest paper, featured us several times. We were given the whole front section on the Religion Section. We were written up in lots of national magazines. We were a big part of a Public Broadcasting System one-hour special on national TV about the Church of the Redeemer’s worship, community and ministries. The Harris County Medical Society monthly journal featured me as a home missionary, “one who did not have go to a third world country to serve those in need.” A Jewish physician was the president of the medical society and it was his article. I’ll tell you this by experience; the real God and real Jews and real Christianity get along real well, including in co-ministry. We all received good reports all around.

We loved our patients. We prayed with many of them because talking with the Lord was LIFE and conversations with Him were LIFE-giving. Our patients had come to us for help so they came with souls open to us. When you call the fire department, are you not open for the fire department to help you? When you go to a doctor’s office, are you not open to the doctor you are seeing? It’s very easy for a doctor to become a father-figure, to be looked upon as such. In fact, some of my Catholic patients accidently called me “Father,” then usually corrected themselves. That is an appropriate part of the doctor-patient and other relationships if you are really family and are fulfilling your responsibilities accordingly. So I often prayed for my patients, as did the other doctors and every faithful employee in the clinic.

One day as I was seeing patients in the office I heard a loud female voice down the hallway. I knew that working in that area were some very qualified, mature nurses, so I continued seeing my patients in my area. After seeing another patient, again I heard that loud voice. I decided to investigate. I walked into the examining room where two fine Christian nurses were talking to the upset young lady. She was sitting and the nurses were sitting close to her. She looked like she was probably 19. She had a head full of steam! I walked into the room and stood there a bit. She was chewing and re-chewing on those nurses. As I listened to her, I realized she wasn’t saying why she was angry. She was just angry, and was dumping her anger onto them. One nurse moved so I could sit next to her and I said,

“May I help you?”

*“Who are you?!”* she challenged.

“I’m one of the doctors here. What’s the problem?”

She began chewing on me without saying what her problem was. I let her chew while I spoke silently to the Lord. I was saying, “Lord, what is it; what does she need? Why did you bring her here?” All I could hear in reply was *“Pray for her.”* I always asked my patients first if I could pray for them and I had never been refused, even by atheists. I think that my atheist friends and others had never turned me down for praying with them because we had a personal relationship; we had a love. Even from the first visit, we were friends. In this case I continued rejecting that persistent *“Pray for her”* because I knew she was going to say “No!” Soon I decided that it was the Lord telling me to pray for her, but I knew she would run if I asked her permission. I grabbed her firmly by the wrist and said,

“I’m going to pray for you.”

*“No, you’re not!”*

She tugged and I tugged; she tugged and I tugged. I bowed my head and the nurses knelt in closely. This time I must have prayed about 45 seconds, not my usual 30. I called on the Lord for peace in her soul and a revelation of His love. While I was praying she stopped tugging and started crying. Then I asked her,

“What was the problem?”

*“I was in here last week. Y’all treated me and I felt like everybody in here loved me. I had to come back and find out.”*

She hadn’t behaved that way on purpose. She had not been griping at us all that time aware that she was trying to verify our love for her. It was a subconscious searching for something of great value to her. The Lord had revealed the truth and depth of our love for her while I prayed. She then understood herself and us, and a bit about the Lord. She was searching for real love.

I gave her an invitation just like the Lord gave to Peter and others.

“Would you like to have a whole new life? Absolutely different, different people, different things? Would you like to become a different person? If you want that, give your life to Jesus and He will give you His life.” We didn’t make part-time offers. Other fine Christian ministries can offer that which fits their calling but we could offer only an entirely new life and full commitment. We were not equipped for halfway houses, food kitchens, or sleepovers in our homes. She said,

*“Yes!”*

“Okay. Just come home with us. If you need to go get your stuff, go get it and tonight you’ll be part of our family.”

She left and soon returned with the contents of one grocery shopping bag. That was her stuff. That was everything she had. She was practically on the streets.

Several days later, our chief lab technologist [that delightful young lady who is woven through this book] came to me and said,

*“I’ve a problem. I’ve been trying to locate this patient who was in here a couple of weeks ago. We did some tests and she needs to be treated for gonorrhea. We can’t locate her. I’ve talked to the City Health Department and even to the guy she lived with. He says she lives with some other dude now.”*

I looked at the name on the chart, and it was *her!* I said,

“Oh, I’m the dude she lives with now!”

So, God rescued her just like He had rescued us. She had been a reprobate, a dead dog, just like we had been. It’s easy to love your own kind. We ex-reprobates have much to offer others who were or still are reprobates, but not much to offer someone who doesn’t know they are or have been a reprobate. If you know you have been forgiven of much, your life shows much love for the Lord and others.

That was God. He led us into the Fourth Ward. We were there because He put us there. We weren’t looking for a place to do a good work, even for Him. He had called us there and He had supplied those places, those buildings, those patients, and one another.

We were given lots of furniture, medical equipment, medicines and the like from hospitals, retiring or deceased doctors and dentists, and from a few churches. There was a very well-to-do church in Houston whose ladies invited me to talk to them about the clinic. They wanted to hear how they might be able to help us. I talked to those beautiful ladies. They were very receptive to the living gospel. When I got through, one of the questions they asked was,

*“What do you need?”*

I had been answering their questions quickly and easily; always zeroing in on the essence of their questions, but when they asked me*, “What do you need?”* I thought,

“Lord, what do we need?”

I couldn’t think of anything we needed. I thought that I should have been able to easily tell them what we needed back at the clinic. I thought again,

“Lord, what do we need?”

He didn’t say anything to me, but He just showed me “You are not needy.” I said,

“Oh! Ladies, we are not needy. We don’t need anything. Don’t think of us as being needy. Our lives are full. Family ministry is being accomplished and we need nothing.”

That being the case, what they eventually decided was that they would give us money and, thankfully, they did.

If we had a convention of Fourth Ward Clinic staff [we simply named it after its location, “FOURTH WARD CLINIC”] we could go on for days and days sharing testimonies. Everybody had their own, plus those who weren’t working at the clinic but were clinic support, such as Nancy and our other families. All kinds of testimony continually flowed at home and in the clinic. The ministry was alive because we were alive. We were alive because the Lord is alive.

Practically everyone at the clinic was a dedicated Christian, but you didn’t have to be a Christian to work there. We had some, like the pharmacy assistant, who was an atheist. I don’t think he remained an atheist, but when he came he was. But you didn’t have to be a Christian or a Jew to work there. Hari Krishnas came by and wanted to be a part of the ministry. Our chief maintenance man, an Assembly of God minister, oversaw their work as they painted the whole outside of our building. It was a work of beauty. They put “Fourth Ward Clinic” on the front of the building. They did a great job. We were blessed with their generosity and fellowship.

Almost everyone had their own church life. The clinic employees were members of all types of churches. Since no one had to be a Christian to work there, you didn’t have to go to a particular church to work there either. Every department head was a committed Christian and was in fellowship with all others and submitted to Clinic authority. As you might have gathered, we had lots of ministers who either dropped their typical ministry in order to work at the clinic or who had already dropped it before coming to work with us. I don’t know how many clergy or ex-clergy we had, probably eight or nine or so, Catholic and Protestant. One of our full-time nurses was a Catholic nun who was released from her usual duties to work with us.

Each person was growing spiritually as the clinic grew. Perhaps it was the other way, that the clinic grew as we each grew and as our sense of being a Medical Community increased. It wasn’t like we had an initial ministry work vision to which we applied ourselves. We had to continue growing daily in order to fulfill God’s purpose in our lives and in our service to Him and others. We were being stretched, sometimes passing the test and sometimes failing the test and having to take it again. Also, we were aware that our ministry was to more than our patients. As we served the Lord and our patients we were testimonies to the medical professionals, the professional schools and students, the city generally, and the churches. We trained medical students, technological and nursing students, doctors in specialty training, nurse practitioner students, pharmacy students and optometry students. All of us professionals were linked with our particular professional organizations.

Back to the Lord’s wonderful and continual provisions. I was asked to go to court to testify on behalf of one of my patients. I have forgotten exactly what the case was, but I was glad to do it. The patient’s attorney said he would call me when they were ready for me to go on the stand, so I wouldn’t have to sit half the day at the court house waiting to testify. He called me and I carried the records I would need. I headed out briskly, drove to about two blocks from the courthouse and pulled into a parking lot. As I got out of the car I thought,

“I don’t know if I have enough money to pay for this parking when I return.”

I hurriedly strode down the sidewalk. As I approached a bus stop where there were probably a dozen or so people waiting to get on their buses, my eyes met the eyes of a man waiting for his bus. He started walking towards me as I continued walking in his direction. I *knew* what he was going to say, and he said it. I didn’t know then the exact change he was going to ask for but he said,

*“Buddy, do you have twelve cents to round out my bus fare?”*

I didn’t know if I had enough money for my own need but this fellow needed twelve cents *now.* Repeat: “I didn’t know if I had enough for *me* later and he needed it *now*.” The situation was a set-up by the Lord and it should have clued me immediately, but I said, “No, I don’t” and kept on walking. As I walked by him, he swore at me and I realized “I needed that. I deserved it.” It was like that day in King David’s life when he was fleeing Jerusalem and a man named Shimei was throwing rocks at him and cursing at him. One of David’s men asked, *“Can I go up there and cut off his head?”* and David said, *“No, he’s speaking for the Lord.”* I knew this guy was speaking for the Lord, kind of, maybe not the exact choice of words.

In fact, when I got to the courthouse, I found that I should have gone to the courthouse annex which was another several blocks away. Now I *knew* I was going to be late. Indeed, when I arrived at my correct destination I was late. The judge had to adjourn court until I got there. They resumed, I gave my testimony and left. The closer I got to that parking lot, the heavier my feet got and the more I came under conviction. Would you like to know how much money I had after I paid the parking fee? Would you like to make some wild guess? Yes; twelve cents. I would like to be able to tell you that I trusted the Lord and gave that man at the bus stop twelve cents, and that I then had exactly the right amount for my parking fee, but I can’t. However, in the years following I may have gotten more out of that failure than I would have had I been faithfully obedient.

God was working in our lives all the time, moving us ahead and growing us up. Our failures also grew us up because we took them faithfully. We were living by faith, with mistakes. Even in our mistakes we lived by faith, with a generous amount of repentance. We grew.

I entered an examining room to see a patient. She immediately said, with a broad smile, “Look, I’m clean,” while holding her arms out palms up. I understood her terminology, meaning that she had no needle marks and was off of intravenous drugs. Her blouse was sleeveless and upon examination I could see that indeed she was off of intravenous drugs. Her arms were beautifully smooth. I didn’t recognize her, which she noticed, saying, “You don’t remember me, do you!” I confessed the truth. She said she had been in to see me a year previously for treatment of abscesses up and down her arms from “shooting up.” As I had treated her abscesses, she said, I told her that she could have an entirely new life if she wanted it and that when I had finished her treatments I asked if I could pray for her, to which she consented. She said when I prayed I asked the Lord to speak to her, because one word from Him would change her life. She added that when she left the clinic she thought I was the kookiest doctor in the world. She went home, loaded her “rig” with more drugs, and was about to inject herself when “A voice said, ‘No, not anymore.’” She said she knew that voice had not come from the radio or T-V, but that it was the Lord. She took the needle out of her arm and had not had any drugs since. In fact she was going to church and living for the Lord.

The clinic’s third location was also filling up with workers and patients. We had about 75 full-time employees and about the same number of part-time employees. The amount of commitment was equal for both full and part-time employees. When someone applied for employment, whether full or part-time, they first had to pass a test. They had to spend several days rotating through the clinic, observing patient care and employee-patient relationships in all departments. Some failed the test, saying that they could not relate that closely to the patients. Most could and did.

There is a little trilogy that speaks of our pains and joys while working with the Lord. It has to do with the variable ways He handled common problems, in this case abortions. Trilogy Part One: A teenaged high school girl came to the clinic seeking an abortion. She was frightened and “alone,” not having told her parents of her pregnancy. I recognized her last name. Her father had been a classmate of mine in medical school. In fact, Nancy and I had been fairly close to her parents -- 13 years earlier. I knew her parents to have been very committed Christians. They had been of the few medical students and wives who had close fellowship with all the rest of us yet while not tarnishing their Christian testimony. At my questioning, she told me that she had a good relationship with her parents but had not told them she was pregnant. After we had talked awhile she acknowledged that she should share her dilemma with them and decided that she would. We prayed and she left. I felt that the child in her womb was secure. Several months later I learned that her father had arranged for her to have an abortion. As I considered that Christian brother doctor, I realized that one may not know how he or she will act until they themselves have gone through the fiery trials where others have failed.

Trilogy Part Two: The single young adult lady had not been my patient. She was in the clinic to have her two-week post-abortion check-up. It is common for the abortionist to instruct his clients to see a doctor in two weeks to determine that she has then [at least physically] healed. She was there only for that examination and report. All the while as I was examining her I kept asking the Lord what was the key to her soul. I knew how to talk to her medically, but she was in trouble. She repeatedly told me that it was really nothing to have an abortion. She was tossing her pony tail around as she described how “nothing” her abortion was. She was obviously being tormented badly, her soul loaded with guilt. But what was the key to her heart? Eventually the examination was completed and we were sitting at my desk, when the Lord gave me that key. I said, “You will be so very happy one of these days when you die and go to heaven.” She asked, “Why?” I said, “There you will meet your child and you will both be very happy.” She broke down weeping and expressing her grief. She opened to the Lord and left the clinic that day relieved of earthly and eternal guilt.

Trilogy Part Three: This single young adult lady also had not been my patient. She was early in her pregnancy, and was exploring whether to abort her baby. She wanted to know if she was indeed pregnant [she was] and wanted information about her options. I was grieving for her and her child while asking the Lord for the key to her soul. In her case He gave me the key. I wrote on a prescription pad, first her name at the top, then the word “LIFE” in the medicine space, and then signed my name at the bottom. That was it, except for our prayer in which I asked the Lord to guide her actions. I didn’t hear back from her.

Fifteen years later I was walking through the lobby of a bank when a lady teller walked up to me, saying that she wanted to visit with me and my wife some day soon. I didn’t know her. We arranged for her to come to our home the coming Saturday. She and a young boy came right on time. Nancy and I sat on a couch and she sat between us. She had this large, eight-inch thick album which she laid on her lap. When she opened it, on page one was a photograph of a child and a prescription on which was written “LIFE.” Her 14 year old son was there in the room with us. The album was loaded with wonderful things about his life from birth to recent date, his exemplary character, and his service to the Lord and community.

What does that trilogy say? To me it says that the Lord is absolutely the Lord and will show His lordship to those who will trust Him. He has the little babies in His hands – the born and unborn. Some of his family will wilt, and some will stand.

One of the Redeemer elders had moved his family from the Redeemer area to the area of the Fourth Ward that interfaced with Houston’s large hippie area. One evening a hippie couple and their two small children had just driven past that Christian home [you guessed it, in their Volkswagen van] when they abruptly stopped, reversed, parked, got out and knocked on the door. When someone answered, in typical hippie lingo he asked, “Hey, man. What’s going on here? The vibes coming out of this house are strong!” They were invited in and received their answer. The Lord grabbed their hearts and the entire family entered into Life.

When we lived near the Redeemer we began having a certain trouble. Our sons’ toys began to disappear overnight from our fenced-in back yard. Then the boys noticed their missing toys had turned up a few houses away in the back yard of a family that had several kids their ages. They and we were strangers. It was time for another application of “when someone steals your coat, give them your shirt.” Nancy baked a beautiful cake and delivered it to the lady of the house, with kind, neighborly words. No mention was made of the toys. However, we didn’t lose any more toys. Neither did we get the other toys back, but we had not given our shirt in order to retrieve our coat.

As with Nancy and me, the boys had both good and difficult times. The loss of those toys was difficult for them. However, the brother who was a steel worker, whom the Lord had healed of his balance damage, built them a two-story, split level tree house far up in one of our gigantic trees. It was an engineering marvel with heavy boards and steal bands and bolts through limbs. It was also a miracle of love that covered a multitude of sins, disappointments, desires and needs.

THE SULPHUR SPRINGS STORY

I was in the Fourth Ward for over seven years; of which three were in the large, last location in the former supermarket. The Lord was about to call me away because, remember, I was not a doctor. I was God’s son who doctored. He called us to Sulphur Springs, Texas. Here’s how it happened:

I was working in the Fourth Ward Clinic one day when I received a call from a doctor in Sulphur Springs. We did not know one another. He identified himself and said,

*“I want to know some things and I hear that you can tell me. Does God still do things like He did in the New Testament, in the book of Acts? Is He still doing*

*those things?”*

I didn’t tell him yes or no. I just testified to him for 20 or 30 minutes. Then he said,

*“That’s all I want to know. I’ve been on the verge of REALLY giving my life to*

*the Lord and if He’s that real, I can do it.”*

And he did it. After that we got into a close relationship with him and others of his interdenominational prayer group in Sulphur Springs. Many of them visited our church on numerous occasions and eventually asked if someone would come to Sulphur Springs to do some teaching. I think maybe it was once a month that I went there, and for perhaps a year. Doug, a faithful brother in Athens, Texas, had an airplane. We flew from Houston to Sulphur Springs and back in an evening. After a while, the Bible study group said,

*“We have had all of the Bible study and prayer times that we need. We have read all of the books on Christian community. Now we need to make a move. We need somebody to come up here and live among us so that the body of Christ can be formed.”*

We were the ones who were sent -- Nancy and I, our three of five sons who were yet at home and one additional young man, Keno, who was a Hispanic who had been a Redeemer neighborhood gang member. He had done various things of mischief in and around the Redeemer church and on the cars that were parked there at night during meetings but God grabbed him and made him a real fine son. Years later, in 2013, we spent some time with him while I was at M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. For years he has had an air conditioning business and is doing great with the Lord. So are his wife and kids.

So we were sent to Sulphur Springs where we lived for six years. I came back occasionally to work at the clinic two or three days a week. They needed doctors. Things had necessarily changed after my departure. I had been the main doctor, chief of medical staff [meaning the doctor staff had been built around me], and the clinic administrator. It was being reorganized as a neighborhood clinic, which it already was, but it was being organized this time with a board of qualified people from around the city instead of the neighborhood or of ourselves. It now required and had acquired big time financial support.

A more formal relationship was developed with the medical schools. Mine had been a personal-professional relationship. While I had been there the schools had sent students and resident doctors to the clinic for training. There had been no formal, contractual association between the clinic and the medical schools. Now it was necessary to formalize relationships. I’m not qualified to speak more accurately about the clinic at this time, being almost 40 years departed. My last information was that the clinic has a steady board, reliable funding, and doctors from the medical schools teaching student and resident doctors.

Doug, the brother with the airplane, and I had lots of fellowship time while flying. He had and has the genuine spirit of servanthood. He flew in almost all kinds of weather, being instrument rated and having a twin engine plane. Most of the flights were in Texas and all were within the United States. One late night we were coming back from a trip in the Gulf Southeast. We planned to land at Houston Hobby Airport south of Houston, which was considerably closer to home than Houston Intercontinental Airport. The tower reported that they were becoming fogged in, and that we should go north to Houston Intercontinental Airport. We decided to at least attempt a landing at Hobby. On our approach we couldn’t see anything, not even the ground. I was looking for the ground out of my window and Doug was bringing us in on the flight path by instruments. We strained our eyes to get a view of the strobe landing lights that began far out beyond the runway. We got lower and lower. Then I saw some sort of light and said, “I see a light.” Doug gunned the plane and we circled toward HIA. On the way there I asked him why he had pulled away instead of continuing on course for landing. He said, “You said, ‘We are going to crash.’” I knew what I said and Doug knew what he heard. The Lord was our communicator that night and may have lengthened our earthly lives.

As the Lord developed my traveling ministry it became common that a couple of nights each week and three out of four weekends, I would be gone from home. If it was during the week, it would be somewhere in Texas. On the weekend, it was likely out of Texas, from California to Connecticut, from Friday night, all day Saturday, and half day Sunday at churches or retreat centers. Mainly, I testified, taught Scripture application to all of life, and possibly preached.

I had a team, a flexible team with one or two guitarists, because the Lord had anointed our church with music and worship. Upon our arrival at a destination, Pat, one of our team, would write a play from the spiritual dynamics she perceived during our first [usually a Friday evening] service. She has continued writing plays professionally over the years, much of the time in England where she and her family reside. As part of the team, she had a great gift for seeing what was going on in those congregations or retreat centers on Friday night while I spoke, would see the response of the congregation, hear the response of the pastor who was in charge for the occasion, and by Saturday morning would have written a play. She would have it all printed out and would select the Lord’s choice of actors from among our group and the attendees. The actors would stand on stage in line, all facing the audience, parts in hand. She would have had an hour or so to prepare her cast; then we were on! No one had to memorize their lines but we were taught how to act-out our parts. We would speak our lines to the audience, not turning to talk to the other actors but to the audience. It was most effective. Overnight she had insightfully scanned the audience, had seen their responses to the message, and had written them into that play. The audience was revealed, actually exposed, before their eyes.

Our guitarists were really good. They made the group comfortable and receptive to the Lord before I began to speak. Our ministry was very simple, yet profound. The more genuinely spiritual, biblically conformed, and yielded to the Lord we became, the simpler everything became. The Bible became simple; the walk became simple; life was more easily understood. The closer we got to the Lord, the easier it was to walk with Him.

(From Nancy) The Lord did a miracle for our organist one time. The pastor’s wife was a professional music teacher, having taught on the university level. In fact, that’s where she and her husband had met. She became our leader of music, choir director, pianist and organist as it developed in the church. But when she and their family first came to the church there was an organist and 4 people in the choir, all paid and non-members. No one from within the church was involved in the music. The truth is that one of the choir members read joke books during church services, not being involved until time to sing. So when Graham and Betty arrived, Graham released all five of them. No choir, no organist; but Betty was a professional and just stepped right in. It was an old pipe organ and really difficult to play, but she did it. When the Holy Spirit first began falling on that small congregation, most left but others dove into Life. The choir grew from nothing. Early-on there was Bob and me in the small new choir. In choir practice one evening Bob said to Graham,

*“Why are you going up when I’m going down?”*

“Because you’re singing soprano. You’re supposed to be singing the base line

like I am!”

That’s the kind of choir members Betty started with. Bob had never sung in a choir before, not even in the shower, but he was a warm body, could wear a choir robe, and march in line. The Lord provided people. Then a number of college-age people began coming to the church. Some were gifted musicians and easily seen to be God’s gifts to the choir.

Then Betty became pregnant and was getting pretty far along, close to delivery. We thought,

*“Who’s going to play the organ?”*

One day a lady called the church and said,

“I’m Cathleen. I’m looking for a place to practice a pipe organ while I am visiting Houston this summer.”

She was visiting her family locally while her husband was working overseas. We said,

*“Oh sure, the sanctuary is not usually well air conditioned on week days, but if you’re willing to be our organist for a few weeks you can practice as you desire.”*

So she came. After some length of time she started noticing some things that she was just curious about. She had been around a lot of different denominations but she became curious about what was going on in this Episcopal Church. She would hear us singing in our regular services and informally in the chapel. The chapel singing was not any great, fancy music like she as a professional pipe organist played, but it really caught her eye and her ear. She listened, and then visited the non-traditional services and the people. Before long, she was part of us. At first she could not appreciate the simple songs that were easy to sing the first time heard. However, as she joined in, the Lord gave her a song that was very simple and melodic; nothing great, certainly not the fancy organ music type. That song is now published in several hymnals, such as the Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church hymnals. It expresses her heart’s desire which had been fulfilled: “I want to walk as a child of the Light.”

The Lord drew people to the church on His own schedule, of course. His schedule being coordinated with our needs was confirmation that we also were on His schedule. Cathleen’s sister joined us and eventually married one of the fine younger men. The sister had a beautiful singing voice and can be heard on much of the music that was eventually published. We started by making tapes, of course, that being the day of tapes. Later we made CD’s and offered worship music on the market. Many first heard of the church through music because we were really gifted with worship and music. Once while we were visiting in Scotland on a teaching-testifying mission, a man said,

*“I’m from Texas and I’ve heard of that Church of the Redeemer through its music. I wanted to visit but when I visit home in Texas, I never quite get there. Now I get to hear teaching from Church of the Redeemer in Scotland!”*

*The Lord had begun sending me and someone else, usually Bob West, who at that time was a single business man with a prophetic anointing, to various places around the world. He would tell us where to go, when to go, how long to stay, what to do and what not to do, what would happen to us, who to talk to, and so forth. He had done that sort of thing from the beginning of our walk with Him, increasing the scope from the neighborhood to statewide, nationally, then internationally. Some of those objectives were medical schools, churches, seminaries, retreats, national leaders, bishops, Papal Nuncio, and ordinary people whom He would tell us about in the Spirit and then do what He said He would do as we simply went.*

part 7

While moving on through the things we’ve already covered and the things we have yet to cover, I must say again that there is no end to the wonderful things that the Lord has done and that He is the only one who remembers each of them. There are more forgotten than remembered. During teachings and conversations they come to remembrance according to need, but to sit for dictation there are many missed. God knows and He is our help. Even those completely forgotten are recorded where they are important – in the books of heaven and in the lives of those who lived them.

After sending us around town in Houston, then across the state and across the country for brief trips, the Lord began to send us out of the country, first to Mexico and then to other places around the world. That started while we were still at the Redeemer. It was there that our lives had been drawn closer together. We had all things in common, which does not mean we had one corporate title to our properties, but that all we had was readily available to others’ needs. We held individual title to our possessions. Without intending to put into effect biblical living as shown at the ends of Acts chapters 2 and 4, we had things in common because we loved one another and functioned as a family. My car title was in my name but if it was needed for a loan or a gift, it was loaned or given. The same applied to our houses and other possessions. There was the sense that things were not ours but were the Lord’s and we knew we were stewards of them. But according to the culture we lived in, American culture, Texas, etc., property had to be in someone’s name, so they were. Back in Jesus’ day, title to real estate and other property was handled similarly.

And so, we got closer to one another and to the Lord. We had order among us as an identifiable Christian family. We were one-minded because Jesus was our head. That made obvious His presence among us. After being in one of our church services, whether a small or large service, visitors would be moved on by the Holy Spirit. They realized God’s presence. People would tell us, *“God is with you here.”*  It wasn’t simply a religious feeling, but the presence of the Lord.

As I was saying, one of the things He began to do after about three years of our coming together was to send us out. During those three years as He was building the community, we had no outreach ministry. People came and visited us which they continued to do afterwards, but before that, we didn’t go out anywhere to minister formally. People who were honest church people with good minds and solid biblical principles would say to us*,*

*“All of this going on among you is fine, but what kind of ministries do you have going on out there in the world?”* Of course, we would tell them the truth which was “Nothing.” Our only reason for not having outreach ministries was that the Lord had not called us to that yet. We knew His voice and His callings in our lives together. We knew His directions as we lived together minute by minute, and day by day. He spoke to each one of us, not just to those in leadership. We simply had not developed any outreach ministry because He hadn’t called us to it. It sounded like a lame excuse, but we knew it was true.

After three years, He began to develop ministries and send us out. For example, He sent some of us to Mexico. A quiet young man, Bob West, had a prophetic ministry and a sensitive spiritual ear. He heard the Lord in particular ways similar to my hearing. He was involved with me on all these travels. I don’t remember exactly if it was him or me, but we began to have a sense that God wanted us to go to Mexico. He, Nancy and I talked and prayed about it. The most faithful and direct way we felt like we could approach the call was by studying over a map of Mexico. We got a big map of Mexico and laid it out on our dining room table. It was big like one of our Texas highway maps. We were impressed that Mexico was also a pretty big place, but the Lord knew exactly where He wanted us to go. We decided we would simply ask Him. We parted that first night and came back together the next after we had asked the Lord for directions while apart. We shared where we heard the Lord told us to go. Bob West and I were within an inch of one another on that big map of Mexico. We were called to the Mexican state of Chiapas in southern Mexico, the state that borders Guatemala.

Over a period of a couple of weeks we met together pretty much every night to share what the Lord was saying to us about the trip. He had said to stay there for three weeks and when to go, which was something like a month away. He told us to go to a particular village called La Concordia, and that our purpose was to have fellowship with the priests in that church. La Concordia was a very remote place. I wasn’t much up-to-date on Mexico but I was surprised there would be a church in that little village out in nowhere beyond the end of the road. Some incidental things: The Lord said not to use our own money. He said we were to use only $300 for the trip and He would provide it. Now, that was airfare for two, for being there three weeks, and a day’s travel both directions. That was a pretty sparse provision financially. And He said, as kind of a side comment, that I would meet a missionary in an airport in Mexico and there would be a financial problem. That was just a bit of information to be stored in memory for future use. He didn’t say what to do about it. Our route was by plane from Houston to Mexico City and from Mexico City to the state capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez. Then we would catch a bus to go down a dirt road about 75 miles until it ended at a river. We would make our way across the river and walk a couple of miles the remainder of the way into the village of La Concordia. That was our plan as we filled in the Lord’s outline.

It was time for Bob and me to share with the elders what the Lord had said and that we two would be going. We shared all of it, but we didn’t share that the Lord had said other people would provide the finances for our trip. We never shared that kind of thing. Neither did we share that bit of information with others. As usual when we shared with them what God had told us, and that we were ready to go, we said that if the elders did not agree 100% that this is the Lord and that we should do it -- we won’t go. Perhaps some who have not experienced biblical-spiritual-brotherly unity with the Lord being the Head of the body would question, “Why would we say that we would not go if these human beings, the brother elders, said not to go when God had said to go?! We knew that God had told us to go but, to us, God had created this family of His people [this body of Himself] and there wasn’t any conflict between what He had said to us and would say to the others. Our unity and the submission that we had among ourselves was a very precious thing to the Lord and any possible disagreement was His to work out. Jesus had prayed that His Father would give the church that unity and His Father had granted His request. His Father was also our Father. Ours would be nothing less than a full-confidence, 100% vote. We didn’t expect there to be a problem but if there was, He would work it out.

The word was “GO” so we shared the available information with the congregation that Friday night. There were people from all denominations present including Baptists. That’s an important point because any time a Baptist hears about someone going on a missionary trip they respond with prayer and money. During the next week, a couple of those Baptists gave us something like $35 and Bob West found some coins. He was walking down the stairs at his house when a bunch of coins simply fell on the floor. He was surprised. He didn’t have any coins in his pockets or any holes in his pocket. The coins just fell on the floor. He picked them up and it was something like a dollar’s worth. When we got together that night, as we did every night at that point, we thanked the Lord for our $35 and coins that He had already started to provide for us. As those few weeks progressed, we encountered people who had financial needs. At that point, we didn’t have money ourselves to meet their needs, but we had this money God had provided us for the trip. So how could we say to them,

*“God has given me what I’m going to need a few weeks from now. Sorry, I can’t help you with your need of today?”*

How could we hold back from our brother today what God had given us for our future? We couldn’t do that, so we were back down to practically nothing by the time for our departure. We had given away the money that God had given us. On the morning of our departure we had $25 that God had provided through other people.

In those years it was not necessary to pay for your tickets until you arrived at the airport. You could make phone reservations, walk into the airport, pay for the tickets and get on the airplane, even the international flights. Times have changed, haven’t they! It was mid-morning. We were scheduled to leave at noon. We were all packed. God had said He was going to provide the $300 and that we should not use our own money. He had provided $25. so far. It was getting kind of close.

The phone rang. I was not at home and I will tell you later why I wasn’t. Nancy answered the phone. It was this brother in the church, Ross, a businessman. He said to Nancy,

*“God is telling me to give Bob $275. Does he need it?”*

Nancy said it was exactly what we needed. He knew *nothing* about our need. Nancy called me. Where was I? “Faithful Bob Eckert” was at the office scraping up $275. from the business account for the trip. At that point I went ahead and used our personal money because the brother didn’t have enough time to get his money to us. His check supported our household in our absence.

We landed first in Mexico City. It would be a 20 hour layover before flying out to Tuxtla Gutierrez. Our plan was to visit around town a few hours and then check into a reasonably priced hotel for the night. While we were going through customs the Lord said, “I have a person of my own choosing to take you around.” We considered the best way to fit in with the Lord’s plans was to collect our [small] bags and stand at the exit to the airport parking lot. That would make it easy for the Lord’s chosen person to see us. So we stood there and chatted for probably 20 minutes while eyeing every driver who exited. I’m sure that if any of them had even glanced my way I would have waved to the God-chosen driver so he/she would not have missed us [another very unfaithful move for the day]. After those 20 minutes of waiting, we realized that we were not trusting the Lord at all! He had said He had that person and we did not trust His word. So, we stopped watching the cars and instead began chatting between ourselves.

In less than a minute Bob West, who was facing me and toward the outside street said, “Look at that fellow.” I turned and, the distance of 4 parked cars down the street a man had one foot inside his car but was waving both arms at us. I said to Bob West, “Come on, Bob, that’s God’s man.” He was a Mexican who worked for a soup company. He had been in the airport doing his business at the cafeteria and was definitely not going to leave his parking place until he had those two Americans into his car. He spoke perfect English. For the remainder of the afternoon and early evening he drove us around Mexico City. We saw all the sites and more.

As the evening wore on he took us to a small, three-story hotel and made verbal arrangements for us at the desk. At that point the Lord said, “Speak with that man.” “That man” was the desk manager, who spoke no English -- none! Before our English-speaking friend left I requested that he ask the night manager if he could join us in the lobby for a visit. He asked, he agreed, we did. There we sat, with my 20 words of Spanish and Bob West’s 30. In a few minutes we had arranged and rearranged those words as much as we could and things got quiet. I knew we were about to lose him from our “conversation group.”

Then into the hotel walked a very drunk Mexican. This was during the Olympics in Mexico City and this man had been on the Mexican weight lifting team, which was already out of the contest. He plopped down in a seat and got into the non-conversation. His English was very good, but had a strongly alcoholic accent. Ah, Ha! Here was God’s translator! He agreed to translate for us. But every time I said something for him to translate to the hotel manager the translator would answer back to me himself, without translating it to the manager. I tried to get him to be our translator but he was too attracted by the topic, which was “the Lord.” Soon I perceived that the conversational group was a set-up to entice the Olympian.

The hotel manager left us to ourselves and we got serious with the weight lifter. Anything I said to him about the Lord or the church he jumped onto with both feet. I agreed with his one-sided analysis of God and church as he had experienced them. He had obviously had a lifelong negative experience with religion. My abbreviated agreements were about all that I could insert into the evening’s contributions of God’s inebriated gift. I was his emetic and I loved him. After about an hour he began to give me some space to express myself. I started talking about the Lord looking for sheep, and that there are so many goats. I talked about intimacy with the Lord Jesus and about hearing Him speak with us. As I talked during that second hour he not only got peaceful but fully sober. He became one of Jesus’ sheep that evening.

The next morning Bob West and I boarded the plane for Tuxtla Gutierrez. It was a two hour flight in a Constellation, which is a 4 engine propeller driven plane. When Constellations were in their heyday it was a very luxurious plane that traveled around the world, into different countries, over the great oceans and continents. It had long since been replaced by jets on most flights. After two hours of flying we noticed that the Tuxtla Gutierrez airport was a little asphalt strip with no taxi-ways, just a landing strip, and that at one end of the strip was a ravine and at the other end the base of a mountain. We landed and were only 75 miles from our destination.

As we came down the ladder I noticed that at the bottom of the steps was a low-level airport employee, a laborer, in airport uniform. As I drew closer to him, the Lord said,

*“Talk to that man.”*

So, when I got down the steps, I stepped up to him and held out my hand. He took it. As we shook hands I told him in Spanish,

*“My name is Dr. Robert Eckert.”*

I could say that very well in Spanish! I told him I was from Texas, America. He just looked at me as if to say, “So?” I grabbed at some more words and put them together and said something like,

*“Mexico is a pretty country!”*

I was running out of words again. I couldn’t figure out how to fit in some of my remaining words like “patio” and “lariat”. They just wouldn’t fit into the conversation. I was pondering what was going to come next. He had this puzzled look on his face. Then this other Mexican, possibly seeing the situation, came walking up and said something to me in Spanish. It was a great help that he motioned for us to follow him. God was obviously doing the next step, so we followed. He led us into the little airport terminal, down the hall and into the office of the airport director, Col. Jaramillo. We greeted one another in perfect English. He was a retired Mexican Air Force Colonel. We talked a bit and then he asked where we were going. I said, “La Concordia.” He said, *“Well, you can’t go there.”* When I asked why, he said,

*“The rains have washed out the road and the bridges. You can’t get through.”*

I knew we were going because that’s where the Lord said to go and I knew the next most logical thing other than walking was to go in on horseback. I just said, “We’ll go in on horseback.” It was only 75 miles, we would have to sleep out overnight, allow for food, etc. We, including our rumps, weren’t equipped for two or three days of saddle, but at that point it seemed reasonable. The Colonel also told me that before he had become the director of the airport, he had been the director of the airport in Juarez, Mexico across the river from El Paso, Texas. The Juarez airport was a much bigger airport than this one in Tuxtla Gutierrez. In fact he was a little apologetic about being found down there in that dinky place after being at such a big and jet airport like Juarez.

When I learned that he was from Juarez, and that we were getting into a possibly difficult situation about transportation, I thought, I know one couple in El Paso and no one in Juarez. The couple in El Paso was a doctor and his wife with whom Nancy and I had been very close in medical school about 6 years previously. So I said; “Colonel, did you have any friends across the border in El Paso? He said, “Yes, I did.” I said, “Did you know Dr. Rudy Rivera?” With excitement to match mine, he responded with, “My very best friend! My very best friend!” Our relationship warmed considerably.

Sounding less official, he asked,

*“Why are you going to La Concordia?”*

Using the only information we had, I said, “We are going to have fellowship with the priests in that village, in La Concordia.”

He said, *“One minute, please.”* He picked up the phone and called the bus station. He learned that the bus was going to go as far as it could the next day. Then he called in the man who had brought us into his office [his chauffeur, as it turned out] and told him to take us to the hotel where he was staying and to get us a “bargain” rate. On the way to the hotel we were shown the correct bus station for our trip, it being 3 blocks from our hotel, and the chauffeur did our negotiations at the hotel. So we didn’t have to dip into our meager funds for a ride into the town. We were on track and on schedule.

We were already traveling pretty light. Both of us had one regular sized suitcase but we decided for this last 75 miles and 3 weeks in La Concordia we were going to have to dig down a little lower, so we got some bolsas [little open-top bags with handles] in which to carry only essentials for the last leg of our trip.

The next morning we walked the few blocks and got on the bus. It was a typical Mexican short distance bus, the size of a short school bus here in Texas. It was loaded up with all types of things, animals, and people – inside and on top. We made it to the inside, not on top. The bus would go several miles and come to a washout. There it would go off into the woods, grinding into low gear, slowly but gradually find its way through the brush and arroyo, then make its way back onto the road. It would soon come to another arroyo where the water had washed out the approaches to another bridge and the driver would do the same thing. Lo and behold, the 75 miles was only a day’s trip. We finally arrived at the river where there had never been a bridge. We were now on our own. We had made it without horses.

Although we didn’t end up riding horseback or walking, there was now the river. We walked through the brush down to the water’s edge where there was a dugout canoe and two men with poles. For a peso or two they poled us across the river. We followed the trail for a few more miles and there it was -- La Concordia. From the edge of town to the center [El Centro] was about 6 blocks. We walked to El Centro and sat down on a bench in the park. “Here we are, Lord!” We realized we were there as a result of the Lord’s calling and of His hand upon us in our preparations and travel.

Now that we were in La Concordia, unable to communicate, planning a 3-week stay, we expected to find someone who could speak English. It would have been good, we thought, if that person would be the priest, to whom we were sent to have fellowship. We found out fairly soon that there had been one person, a young kid, who could speak a little English. He had left a day or two before we got there and he didn’t get back until after we left 3 weeks later. There was nobody, including the priests, the most educated people in town, who could speak any English. There were no English speakers in town. This was obviously the Lord’s handiwork. He was not handicapped, although some could have said that we were.

So we sat on that bench a few minutes and rested. Practically all the buildings were one story. There was one two-story building, the one called “the hotel.” Then we said,

*“Sure enough, right there on the square is a church, just like the Lord said there would be.”*

We got up, walked over to the church and knocked on the door. We asked to speak to the Padre. Every day, for at least a couple of hours daily, we had a sit-down heart-to-heart visit and “conversation” with the two priests in that church. Without any ability to communicate with words, I would make up words that sounded like they should be Spanish. That’s not hard to do and they kind of fit. Gradually, I got across to them where we were from and that God had told us to come. We were there to have fellowship with them.

From the very first visit, that very first contact, we placed ourselves under their authority and they accepted responsibility for us. They arranged a place for us to stay [the hotel], a place to eat at a lady’s house where we could trust the food, a local guide who would walk around with us to see to our needs and to make sure we didn’t get ourselves into trouble. We knew that such brotherly love was unusual, especially in that Mexican state, Chiapas. We already knew that if Mexican or American Protestant missionaries came to town, they usually ran them out. And if any locals had anything to do with the “Evangelistos,” they would be shunned by the town, meaning they wouldn’t buy meat or bread from them; they wouldn’t have anything to do with them.

Here we were with the persons to whom we were sent to have fellowship. Fellowship requires openness and honesty. One of the first things I worked on getting across to the priests was that we were Protestants but we were not protestant Protestants. I tried to describe the church that we were in, which was an Episcopal church. That meant nothing to them. I tried to get across the idea that it was a catholic church but not obedient to the Pope, which had the potential for creating a bad relationship.

But for a couple of hours every day, we drew out of each other that which was in each other’s hearts not just what was in each other’s minds. The Lord knit our souls together as we loved one other, were patient with one other, and worked on what the other person was trying to put together in the other’s language and mind. The Lord just gave us a really wonderful relationship that began the day we arrived because, as I say, instead of running us out of town they got us places to sleep and eat. We paid for everything. They arranged for the Mexican man to watch out for us so we wouldn’t get into trouble and to look to our needs. And we went to the hotel and arranged for our rooms.

The thing that began to develop within me as I saw the situations in town was that there was a tremendous need for general medical care. I was a doctor, so it was easy enough for the Lord to show me medical needs and put them on my heart. The first day our guide/care taker took us to the outskirts of town to a little grass-roofed stick house. There was a mother and daughter, who I would say was in her upper teens. She was dying of what would seem like malnutrition. We prayed for her, “talked about” nutrition, and I went to the pharmacy for vitamin injections that included B-12, which our guide would administer.

We went back in a few days. As we approached there were several buzzards setting around in the yard. Immediately, a spiritual battle was on! When we got to the patient it was easy to see that she was much better. I regret to say that I have no further known follow-up with that patient.

Other locals occasionally ate at the home where we ate. One morning at the house the young girl “maid” of the house showed me a bucket in which were big snails -- escargot. There were probably 20 or 30 in the bucket. A board was kept over the top to keep them from crawling out. She had gotten them the day before and had fed them some tortillas overnight to fatten them a bit. They were for breakfast! One of the guys who was going to eat breakfast was joking with me. He handed me a live snail in its shell. He indicated that I should eat it. I said, “You eat it.” It hadn’t yet been prepared. I didn’t know if there was any preparation to them or not and the lady of the house had not brought them to us. This guy was just joking with me. I indicated, “You eat first.” So he took a snail and with his machete clipped off the “tail” of the shell. That broke the snail’s suction so that it could not keep himself in the shell. Then my fellow diner put the snail up to his mouth and with one suck, sucked it right out of its shell! He chewed that snail and spit out the foot pad, which is ovoid and leathery, about the size of a nickel. That meant that I was next up.

That might have been the first snail he had ever eaten raw, but he had called my bluff! So he clipped the tail off the next one, I put it to my mouth, sucked and gulped. The whole thing went. Don’t ask me what that snail tasted like because my taste buds had no opportunity to taste it. That snail was in and out of my mouth, down my throat and into my stomach in less than a second. Anyway, I had met the challenge!

As we did on many occasions, I cursed every germ in that snail in the name of Jesus and demanded they turn to charcoal [which is good for our health]. Those snails came out of a polluted river. The town drained into the river. The hog sewage system, the dog sewage system and the human open sewage system all drained into the river. There were no restrooms and no city sewage system. Some of the people had outdoor privy systems but there was no EPA. The river was for drinking water, bathing, sewage disposal and *escargot*.

Every morning, Bob West and I would stay in our room late. We would lie in our beds, talk to the Lord and pray about things. We ate two meals a day. We would pray for the people back home who had to live through the grind of things back in Texas while we lived high on the missionary field!

There were two doctors in town. One was obviously hostile to us; the other was curious. The doctors had their own pharmacies and people could buy whatever medicine they chose. They had to pay to see the doctor if they wanted the doctor’s diagnosis and instructions as to which medicine to buy. Otherwise, the people could walk into the drug store and buy whatever they wanted.

Both of the doctors were “cash customer” doctors. People all around them were in miserable shape and had little or no money. The situation appeared to mean less to them than it did to most doctors in the United States. Even though the poor in the States had poor medical care, our poor did have better care than the poor in Mexico. I did meet the other doctor, who became friendly; but we couldn’t communicate.

I began to be very burdened for the people who needed medical care. So, one day I worked on getting it across to the priests that it might be that God wanted me to come there and bring a medical clinic to the poor people in the village. It didn’t take them long to understand and communicate to us,

*“Oh, we have been praying for years for God to send us a doctor to treat our poor people!”*

Here I was, a Protestant in an area of Catholic hostility, a very “religious” Protestant, purporting to be working under the instructions of God and saying openly that God told me to come there. That which could have been a threat to them was instead the answer to their prayers! We were the answer to the prayers of people who had hated us.

Instead of being run off, everything kept getting better and better. We would walk down the street joined by a small crowd that walked along with us. There would always be some kids. One day this Mexican man in his late 20’s, whose height came up to about my shoulder and had been the one whom the priest had assigned to care for us, pulled out a little piece of paper and a nubby pencil. He wrote something on it and handed it to me. It was in English! I already knew his name so I said, “Gustavo, you know English!” He gave me his paper and indicated I should write what I had just said, so I did. He looked at my reply and understood it. He had learned to read and write limited English but he had no idea what it *sounded* like. He had learned enough English for communicating by studying a Spanish-English, English-Spanish dictionary and a little book in English on the level of “Run, Spot, Run.” So we paused and we wrote some things back and forth. He was pretty good at reading and writing English. I wrote to him on that first occasion that he should get more education. He had finished the limit of education in that village which was their 6th grade. He wrote me, *“What else is there?”* I wrote “history, mathematics, algebra” and handed it to him. He pointed to the word “algebra” and asked *“What is that?”* I didn’t know how to define algebra in words so I decided to devise a word problem that would have an unknown in it, and then solve the “x” unknown so he could see what algebra was.

So I wrote out a word problem. As I worked on a formula to solve it, it became obvious that there were two unknowns, an “x” and a “y.” It had been a long time since my high school algebra and I didn’t know how to solve the double unknowns. I set aside that piece of paper and started to write a different word problem. Gustavo noticed. He wrote, *“What’s wrong?” I wrote back, “That’s too hard. I don’t remember how to solve the problem.”* I was to learn that saying, “That’s too hard” to Gustavo was both untrue and a challenge quickly taken up.

For two days I didn’t see him. But after two days when I saw him he had worked it out, not by a formula, but in his mind. I realized we had a really special guy. He still is. This happened in the late 60’s. Now, in 2014, we are still close. We communicate by email, in English only. Our lives have remained close.

That was one of the things that the Lord said to us in preparation for going to La Concordia. He told us there would be a young man in that small town that the Lord had designs for. When this began with Gustavo, we began to think he was the one God had in mind. In fact, a couple of years later from this point in the story, Gustavo’s 14-year old son came back with us on one of our trips and lived with us for four years, getting an American education and an opportunity to know the Lord. So Gustavo’s son was probably the young man that God had designs on.

I made three short trips to La Concordia in the next 6-8 months before taking the clinic and staff. Bob West and I flew each time. We confirmed with the priests that we were coming and what we would do. After that first trip I had taken a quick course in Spanish. A Christian brother who worked in our clinic in Houston, a Catholic priest who was furloughed by his Bishop to work full time with us in the clinic, wanted to learn some Spanish, too. He arranged for a teacher to tutor us so I learned some Spanish quickly. When we went down to Mexico, it took much less time to communicate. It cannot be overstated that we and the local priests were blessed by our language barrier. We gave ourselves to one another for the purpose of perceiving what was on the mind and heart of the other. The Lord made us brothers, not only in the Spirit but functionally.

On the second visit I told the priests that definitely we would be coming, and that I knew they could get into trouble by being so open to our coming. I told them if they didn’t want us to come, they could say so and we wouldn’t tell anyone that it was they who prevented our coming. The priest in charge said,

*“No! We know you. You come.”*

They had found us open, submitted and trustworthy. While we were there, Bob West and I went to the church often, especially on Sunday. That’s one thing we asked him. I already knew we couldn’t take communion. He invited us for the songs and the prayers, but could not invite us to communion. We told him that was O. K. with us.

Really, right away, God gave us a brotherhood about like was already being experienced back in Houston at the Church of the Redeemer. It wasn’t that we walked into unity and mutual submission right off the street because in those first three years as God was putting us together as a parish community in Houston, He had done things inside of us that brought us into submission to each other as unto the Lord. We were confident in the Lord to the extent that we had nothing to fear in being submitted to one another. Instead, it could be said that we had fear of not being submitted to each other; the same righteous fear as of not being submitted to the Lord. That’s the focus. It was not the religious fear that comes with being submitted to fallible brothers – all of us always being fallible.

So when I went down to that village and to those authorities, that was my approach. It had become “natural” to submit to established authority and to be brotherly. As it had been to the Colonel, it was a submitted approach, a brotherly approach. It was my approach to the priests, and to anybody with whom we had contact. I was not the big American doctor who was coming down there to do something benevolent, for which they should get in line to be appreciative. It was not that at all. When I told them we wouldn’t come if they did not want us to come, they said, “No, you come. We know you.”

It was the third trip that filled in a spiritual gap, meaning I had not met with and received permission from the priests’ authority, their Bishop in Tuxtla Gutierrez. I had become very concerned for our newly established brothers in La Corcordia in regards to their bishop.

I did not know what God was going to do in the village as a result of our being there. That is one of the things I told the priests. I added that there would be some changes in the village as a result from our being there, but God would do them, not us. I told him,

“We are God’s people and we will be acting like God’s people, doing what He wants, but we will be in submission to you. Some things will change.”

They accepted that. I suppose they knew that a lot of things needed changing.

But the third trip we made down there before the first summer, I was concerned about their Bishop. Might they give grief to those priests in La Concordia. I did not know exactly what to do about it but I thought I might go to wherever the Bishop was and start sharing with him. So flying down, Bob and I were in the airport in Mexico City in a large waiting area preparing to get on that Constellation airplane again. There were about 40 of us. I noticed what looked like a Mexican priest in our group. He had on his black suit and his white clerical collar.

I found myself being interested in him so i watched him a little bit. Then, and it’s the only time I have physically felt God’s hand touch me, as I was looking at that priest, I felt a hand in the middle of my back. It gave me such a shove that my head and shoulders went back. I was pushed over towards that man. I went up to him and started a conversation. He was not a Mexican but an Italian. In fact, he was the Papal Nuncio, the Pope’s ambassador to Mexico and we had quite a nice conversation there. We agreed to sit together on the plane. For two hours we shared what God was doing in La Concordia and back in Houston, TX and in our lives. He would share what God was doing with him and others, all the way up to what God was doing in Rome. It was the same type of thing – obviously the Lord in every case. This was a good brother.

During that two-hour flight, I noticed through the window that we were flying in a steady cloud cover that was broken from time to time only by a mountaintop sticking up through the clouds. I knew the landing facility at that little airport had a mountain on one end of the landing strip and a ravine on the other. All they had was a beam to help them lead that plane to the airport. The pilot would circle the beam, drop down through the clouds and land. As we got closer to the airport, I shared that bit of information with the bishop.

When we got to the airport the plane made its big circle. We dropped down into the clouds but before we came out underneath, the engines revved and we came back up. I noticed that the bishop was a little nervous. Again, the plane tightened its circle and dropped down into the clouds, but before it came out underneath it revved it engines and we came back up again. This time, the bishop was really showing he was nervous. I just leaned over shoulder to shoulder with him and said, “Bishop, isn’t it good to know that as sons of God, we have already passed from death into life?” And he said, “Yes!” Faith reigned because he was a man of faith. Again the plane went into the clouds. This time it was properly aligned with the landing strip and we landed safely.

I had told the bishop everything we were doing down in La Concordia and how the priests had welcomed us. He was pleased. He said,

“I have not been down here to this state before, so there may be a welcoming committee at the airport. If the local bishop is there, I will introduce him to you.”

[The bishop and the governor were there.] It was a plus to have that kind of introduction to the bishop. Sure enough, as the plane pulled up and stopped its motors, this big crowd of people came out beside the plane. The marimbas were playing. It was a real celebration!

We let everybody get off the plane and get out of the way. Then the bishop walked down the ladder. Bob and I were standing at the top taking it all in. People were greeting him and they were bowing to him. They kissed the ring that signified his status in the Roman church.

Then he stopped everything and motioned to us. He announced us as his American friends who were doing a good work in the village of La Concordia. He welcomed us to Mexico, then introduced us to the local bishop. What was the bishop to do?

A local man from the radio station was there with a cassette tape recorder and a microphone. I stepped up to the bishop and he welcomed me. I could understand that. He may have already heard about us in some other way; I do not know. The bishop and I had a conversation. I don’t exactly know what he said, but I responded in my broken Spanish. He spoke and I responded, and whew, it was over. That conversation was broadcast all over the state. They heard it down in La Concordia. Not only did they hear that we were coming, but the bishop and the Papal Nuncio from the Pope had welcomed us to La Concordia!

The Papal Nuncio received us warmly in his home twice. I asked if I could send him our monthly newsletter from the church in which were teachings, announcements, and things generally parish. He said, “Yes!” and we sent them to him. At that point, I had no more face-to-face contact with him, but three or four years later I was in the church office in Houston and noticed on the church administrator’s desk a change of address request for him. He had become the Papal Nuncio to Canada. He had been promoted among the nations and was requesting that our monthly newsletter go with him.

So that’s a good brother. Wherever he may be right now, still in his flesh or home with the Lord, that was a good brother -- God’s man. The Lord really had seen to it that we got together.

On one of those three preparatory visits, I think it was on the first one, Bob and I realized one evening that we had gotten to know many people all over and around town. But right on the square, there was an adobe building where there were eight to ten Mexican Army soldiers. There was always one out front with his gun. La Concordia was the closest village with the border of Guatemala. We understood that lots of contraband was moving through the area.

This one evening we decided to visit the soldiers. It was a little after dark as we went walking up to the front of the building. The soldier that was there held up his gun and said, “Halt!” The sergeant came out. It turned out that there were six or eight privates and one sergeant. He said something and thumbed us into the building. We followed. He had a little wooden table, maybe two feet by three feet, with folding wooden chairs. They set up two chairs on our side so we sat down. He sat on his side of the table and pulled out a big pad and pencil, flourishing his pencil and looked at us without entirely raising his head. He asked, and I understood quite clearly that he was asking for -- our names. I said, “Doctor Roberto Eckert.” I did not know how to say “Eckert” in Spanish, but I tried. He started writing “Doctor,” very slowly, but was able to finish it without help. When He started writing “Roberto,” one of the privates helped him a bit but suffered a rebuke for his efforts. I had to help him with one of the letters in “Roberto,” and he appeared embarrassed in front of his men. The sergeant had an issue with his pride. I could see it coming, that he would not know how to spell “Eckert” and that I would need to help him. Trouble was coming like a train down the tracks. He looked at me, poised his pencil had a facial expression that asked, “How do you spell your blasted last name?!” I said “E.” He wrote the letter “I.” Belatedly, I remembered that the letter “E” is pronounced “A” in Spanish, and that the Spanish letter “I” is pronounced “E.” With my greatest efforts for politeness, I said, “No ‘E’ – ‘A,’ using Spanish sounds.

He looked very suspiciously at me when I corrected the pronunciation. He knew I had said “E.” I very gently offered to write it for him but he blew me off. This brother’s issue was showing. What was beginning to work inside of me was compassion for what was going on inside of him. We worked on I and finally got my name written. Then he asked,

“What is your mission?”

Mexico was building one of the biggest dams on the continent on one of the biggest rivers on the continent. The Grijalva River was not far away. I now understood that he thought we were spies, spying on their dam project. So to him, this was an interrogative investigation type thing. At some point we were all standing. I don’t remember. The pressure was on our sergeant. All of his men were standing around us. He “knew” that I could speak Spanish but was pulling a ruse on him. He was determined to put an end to the problem. He put his finger out into my face and said in Spanish,

“Speak Spanish!”

For the first time we were really communicating. I did clearly understand him and did know how to answer him clearly. In perfect Spanish I said, “No hablo espanol, which didn’t convince him a bit. It was perfect Spanish and said with my best Spanish accent. Again he said, with the assist of the same finger,

“Speak Spanish!”

Bob was standing next to me so I asked him for help. The sergeant would have none of that. He just shook his head. Then, once again, the sergeant said,

“Speak Spanish!”

He had worked himself into a corner. I figured it was the last time he was going to say that. He was going to have to do something. Compassion for him just welled up in me. I knew he had to do something to save face. The situation would only get worse. He wasn’t going to be able to do “nothing.” This, being God’s kingdom and God’s work, he was about to get into trouble.

At that point Bob, who was pretty hefty and broad, just decided he was out of it. The sergeant wouldn’t let him do or say anything, so he sat back down on his chair. That wooden folding chair collapsed and splintered. Wood went all over the room! Now all the soldiers had gathered around and were intensely interested in every part of the proceedings.

I looked down at my brother Bob who was lying flat on his back with wood spread out all over the room. There was silence. A series of sounds came into my mind. I accepted them as from God and just blurted them out. Everybody laughed! The sergeant laughed and when he laughed, I laughed. We all just laughed for awhile. They got Bob another chair. He sat back down and the sergeant was in a good mood. We gradually worked through anything else that he asked. Occasionally, somebody would just chuckle about the situation and everyone would laugh again. Laughter would break out every once in awhile. Hmmm. God is God.

We finished. Things were going so good that I asked if anybody had a guitar. One of the soldiers had a guitar and knew how to play. We went out onto the veranda and the sergeant sat right down, offered us chairs, and the soldiers gathered around. I asked the guitarist to follow me as I sang.

The only songs that Bob and I knew were about Jesus. So Bob and I sang about Jesus and the soldier picked it up quickly. We sang a couple of songs to them and they would sing a couple to us. Their songs were all beer joint-type whoopee songs. Then they would turn to us and want us to sing; and we sang again to them.

After a while, the sergeant said, in Spanish and I understood him,

“Are you Protestants?”

He had this serious look on his face. They don’t use the word “protestants” but instead, they use the word “evangelistos.” The truth was that we weren’t what he was asking, so I said “no.” I told him we were catholics, which is a good thing for a Baptist-Charismatic type to remember. A Baptist is a catholic, too, if his heart is right before God and man. It was easy for me to say that because it was truth in my heart and because I was an Anglican Catholic, an Episcopalian. So it was an easy and truthful answer. I answered him truthfully. We resumed singing songs back and forth to each other.

The morning we left town a local brother, Gustavo, came by for us on his flatbed truck. They loaded us on that truck. Then Gustavo drove by the soldiers place. Four soldiers and the sergeant got on the truck with us. They had their guns. We went to the river, got out, got our stuff off the truck and, sure enough, there was a dugout canoe. The soldiers lined up on the river bank and aimed their guns in the air. They didn’t fire but they gave us a silent military departure. With teary eyes, and pointing with his now-soft finger, the sergeant twice said,

“You’ll always be in my head and in my heart.”

Obviously God did this encounter with our Mexican brothers but He went way beyond that. Who knows from that point and beyond what happened in that sergeant’s and those soldiers’ lives? God knows. I’ll know, too, one of these days. No doubt, I’ll meet that sergeant again.

I was 38 years old when Bob West and I made our first trip to La Concordia. It was 1968. I was our first of 3 brief trips that, as we eventually learned, were in preparation for taking a medical clinic. That first trip was for 3 weeks. We landed at the airport in Mexico City, collected our bags and were going through customs, talking about getting a ride and finding a hotel. The Lord said [inserting it into our conversation]: I have a man of My own choosing to pick you up.” I shared that with Bob. We wondered, “OK, what’s our part of that?”

We each had one suitcase. There was a big parking lot for the airport. We located the exit, having decided to go stand by it as it went into the street. We stood there and cars would drive by. I remember that I would look at the drivers. We thought we would make it easy for God’s person to notice us and pick us up. We thought we were helping God, which is a good thing to do as far as being available to God. A car would drive by and I would gaze at the person in it. If the driver had ever looked up, I probably would have stuck out my best hitch-hiker’s thumb. But they did not look at us, and drove out. After a little while, another one would drive by and away. We stood there maybe 15 minutes. Both of us felt, “The timing is all wrong, this is taking too long and is not what we would expect from the Lord.” We would have been glad to stand there all day, but we felt like something was wrong.

Then we realized that we were helping God too much. God had said, “I have a man of my own choosing.” In the best of my unbelief, I was making sure that the man of God’s choosing didn’t miss us. How? By sticking up my thumb or waving to the driver. I realized that was unbelief. God said He had this person to take us so we decided to just stop our unbelief and simply stand there.

It was less than a minute later. I was facing the parking lot and Bob was facing me and facing the street. He said,

“Look at that guy out there parked on the street.” It was not parallel but angled-in parking, about five or six cars from this entrance. He had one leg inside his car and one foot still on the pavement. He was waving his hands at us. I turned around and said, “Come on, Bob, that’s God’s man!” We picked up our bags and loaded them into his car. He was a Campbell Soup salesman and had been in the airport doing his business. He spoke great English and asked where we wanted to go. I told him we wanted a nice room at a reasonably-priced hotel for the night because we had to fly out the next day.

He toured us around Mexico City for a bit and took us to the hotel where he ordinarily stayed. It was a small, nice 3-story hotel, moderately upscale, but not like a standard American hotel. It was about 9:00 at night hen we checked in. Our friendly soup salesman helped us check in because the clerk behind the desk didn’t speak any English. That should have alerted me that God was doing something again right on the spot.

As we were checking in, the Lord told me to talk to that man [the night clerk], so I asked our friend who had driven us, as he was getting ready to leave,

“Would you ask him if he had some time to sit over here on the couch and talk to us?”

He said, “Yes,” because there was nothing going on in the hotel that night. So we sat down, our friend left, and just like back in La Concordia, God had taken out the one person who knew how to speak some English. God also removed the English-speaking friend who had driven the car. I sat down on the couch and I started with my Spanish. I couldn’t understand anything he said. He wasn’t really engaged in it anyway. He was just doing it because he’d been asked.

We sat there a couple of minutes and were working on communicating when this Mexican man came in the door. During this time in 1968, the Olympics were going on in Mexico City. This man was on the Mexican weight-lifting team and had lost out on the first day of the competition . He was drunk . I mean he was really loaded, but he spoke good English. He came over and plopped down in one of the chairs. When I perceived that he spoke English, I said, “Ah, God has provided us with an interpreter!” And to myself, I thought “such as he is.” So I asked him if he would interpret for me and the hotel clerk. He said, “Suuurre.”

I said something about the Lord and my interpreter answered me instead of passing it on to the clerk. I said, “No, tell him,” and he did. I said something else and my interpreter again responded to me. Again I said, “Tell him,” and so he did. But when he responded, he responded for himself, not for the clerk.

I got it! I started talking to the interpreter. The clerk disappeared as soon as he could. As soon as he understood that I was talking about the Lord, he blasted the church at-large. He blasted the church where we needed to be blasted. He didn’t hold back anything that he thought. His drunken stupor helped him really lay it on the church. Wherein he was right, I kept saying,

“You’re right.”

It was hard to get into a conversation with him because he wasn’t letting up. Every once in awhile, I said,

“You are absolutely right. You are putting your hand right on what we need to hear in the church.” And he went on for over an hour. The only thing I could get into the conversation and what I was supposed to get in was the truth, deferring to him, and letting him say what he needed to say. Occasionally I could say, “You’re right.”

As he wound down I was able to say a few things. I began to talk to him about what God wants, that people would become like sheep towards Him. I began to describe what it means to be a sheep. I said,

“It’s nothing like what you see in the church. What you are longing for is the real thing!”

I shared Bible teaching and testimony about what it meant to be sheep of God. He relaxed and drank it all in. He responded and became as sober as could be. Selecting that hotel and getting us into it was nothing to the Lord. Getting that brother into the family was God’s plan. God was after the fellow who was right about the church. He was right and he needed somebody to tell him he was right. He needed someone to listen to him and then tell him the truth.

After our three brief visits to La Concordia they were ready to receive us and we were ready to go.

Gustavo had us set up to live and work in the one “hotel” in town, it being empty. Our clinic was in one room downstairs and we lived in three rooms upstairs. Gustavo, who worked with us, taught another person, a local single girl to do what he did. He knew the people and wanted to know how we were going to do the clinic, including patient payment. I said, “The people who have money should pay something. People who don’t have any money pay nothing.”

So he had a system. He would make the charges and would say, “Poor, (pobre), moderate(medio), and rich (rico) .” Nobody was rich but he would deal with the people. We had people lined up all day. We closed like everyone else did for a couple of hours in the middle of the day for a siesta after lunch.

We had Bible studies among ourselves but didn’t teach any of the locals -- but God’s presence began to change things in this town of about 4,000 people. We had been there for a month or more when one afternoon, the church bell began to ring. It rang and rang. We were accustomed to the bell ringing briefly three times a day to announce church services but this day the bell just rang and rang. So I asked about why the prolonged ringing. Gustavo said it was because someone had died. I said,

“This is the first time it’s rung this long since we’ve been here.”

“This is the first time someone has died since you’ve been here.”

We hadn’t been treating any life-threatening diseases. God had just done it. As soon as he told me she was the first person who had died, he said apologetically, “She was an old woman. It was time for her to die.”

We were always saying, “God’s Word says ..” or “the Bible says ..” and then we would simply say what the Word said. The people began going to the priests and asking them to teach them what the Bible says. So, the priests started Bible studies. We didn’t do it. The priests taught them and they were glad to do it.

One summer, we were working on a fairly hot day and the air conditioning went out, way out. Actually, there was no air conditioning anywhere in town. The head priest came in and patiently waited while I finished seeing that particular patient. I had others waiting but I asked him what he had on his mind. He started telling me about a priest who was stationed elsewhere whose main ministry was riding horseback to visit all the nearby colonias, all the little villages. He preached the gospel, taught the Bible, prayed for people and had a very effective ministry.

I wondered why he was telling me about this. Then he told me,

“He got sick and he went to Tuxtla and he’s been there for a couple of weeks being treated by those doctors. He’s just getting worse.” A lot of those doctors in Tuxtla, the state capital, were American graduates. I would have had confidence in their care. The priest sent on to say that they didn’t know what was wrong with him and their treatments were not helping. It began to dawn on me what he was about to ask, then he did, asking if they could bring him to La Concordia for me to treat him.

There was no way I could tell him “No” so I said, “Yes.” He said,

“He’s outside waiting.”

He was a young priest about 30 years old, waiting in the hot sun, in his long black robe. He leaned against the building in order to stand. We got him into the clinic and I told my lab tech, who was a teenage girl from back in Houston,

“Do every test that we can do. Do them all!”

We had very simple blood, stool and urine tests. Our topnotch laboratory technologist at the clinic in Houston had taught her over a period of a couple of months how to do those simple tests. Though she had never done lab work before, she did very well with what she had been well taught.

I had no idea what tests had been done on my very ill patient in Tuxtla. And I didn’t know the treatments they had been using. I was flying in the dark as a doctor. One thing I had done, within a year of coming down to La Concordia, I had flown from Houston to Mexico City and attended an international doctor’s meeting on the Diseases of Mexico. When I saw that offered, I knew that I wanted to get into that seminar. The meeting refreshed me on diseases I hadn’t heard anything about since graduating from medical school.

I considered the conditions that he most likely had and made my diagnosis. I knew that, because of the advanced condition of his illness, plus his obvious dehydration, and having had “it” for weeks I had one shot at the right diagnosis and its right and adequate treatment. We had a few days to turn the course of his health. I had the head priest take him to the priest’s rectory and put him to bed. I had my nurse go over and start some IV fluids with two antibiotics. Potent antibiotics! I hoped that what he had was an infection. It wouldn’t help anything else. We hydrated him with fluids and electrolytes, and we began to love him with our hearts and our medicines. Everyone prayed.

The assistant full-time priest became his continual bedside nurse with cold rags to his forehead, patting him, helping in any way he could. That priest didn’t know anything medically or about bedside care, but what he did was perfect. He hovered over him, prayed for and talked to him. I went over a couple of times that day. I told the priest in charge,

“We don’t have many tests, but I am going to treat him for what I think is wrong with him. I don’t know how it’s going to turn out.”

The priest assured me that there was no pressure on me.

“If he lives, he lives. If he dies, he dies. It will be God who decides. You will not be responsible if he dies.” I knew that and appreciated that he also knew. I went to see him a couple of times the next day and he was worse each time. That evening I prayed,

“Lord, if You don’t heal him, this may be his last day.”

I went to see him the next morning, and he was bad. Always when I went to see him, the priests were gathered together. I told them it was bad.

They knew it. I said,

“I’m going to do like in the Bible. I’m going to lay my hands on him and pray for him and ask God to do a miracle.”

That didn’t surprise them. They were men of functional faith. I put my hands on him, closed my eyes and started praying. I hadn’t said a sentence of my prayer when it seemed like the Lord said, “Stop.” So I stopped. There was silence. Then the Lord began to show me some things. Now, He had showed me diagnoses and treatment before but He didn’t do any of that at all this time.

Instead, He began to show me what wasn’t going on between me and my nurse. Both the lab tech and the nurse were single gals. The nurse was in her 30’s and had never married. God showed me that I was too professional and not sufficiently brotherly and personal with her. He wanted her and me to have a much closer relationship; warmer towards her and more open with her.

Then, still in the silence of the room, He began to impress upon me how my not being warm towards her had affected her. I was surprised at first but when He showed me the adverse effect of my “distance” on her, I began to cry. (You should see us now when we greet one another. Everyone of the old team does a lot of hugging, but when she hugs, she always says, “I’m your nurse” and I always say, “I’m your doctor.”) When she came to the Redeemer, she had been a very damaged person, but has been healed, partly by being part of an intimate, godly family. She had been an intensive care nurse in a Houston hospital, was healed and has long been an intensely caring and capable person.

Back at the bedside, the Lord was breaking my heart. Then He ended it without saying anything. “It” was done. I dried my tears. I didn’t know what the priests thought. They couldn’t have had any idea what was going on between me and the Lord. I felt I needed to finish my prayer since it had been interrupted, so I finished in about 15-20 seconds and said “Amen.” It was superfluous actually. That was all. I left.

When I went back the next time, that evening or the next morning, my patient was entirely different. Tragically different. He had no fever; in fact, his temperature was a couple of degrees below normal. Instead of being red and hot, his skin was grey and cold. A doctor doesn’t like to see that in a severely ill patient. Then I had a thought – one of those that I knew had not originated through my focused efforts.

I recalled something I had learned in medical school. One of the two antibiotics I was administering, when given to babies, causes in a few cases what is called, “the grey disease.” I had never heard of it presenting in an adult, so I decided that God had healed him of his febrile illness and that now the medicine was doing him in. I stopped his medicines.

The next day when I visited him, he was up and going. Three days later the two priests, who had delayed going on a trip, left. My ex-patient was left in charge of the whole parish. He bounced up out of that bed and was going full time!

Well, he didn’t do it in five minutes. He was much better right away and it took a couple of days for him to get back to his normal. I still don’t know what he had. Perhaps it was something that matched up to the medicine we used. I don’t know whether we got him well because of our medical care or if that was something the Lord let us go through in order to work things in us, in me, and/or between me and the priests. There’s no way for us to know the eternal dynamics of that which worked in the depths of our souls. In me, it was in regards to that dear nurse and it spilled over into others. But God got a lot out of that, and I have no idea whether it was because my patient had an infection and we healed him medically, or that the Lord did it with or despite us.

I can’t say my relationships with the priests were improved by our going through that ordeal, because we were already Mexican-American, Catholic-Protestant, loving, trusting brothers.

The priests had a rickety pickup truck. In it one would drive over to the clinic for a daily visit. I had told them,

“You are the people’s pastors here. You are also our pastors when we are here. We need you to oversee us and say whatever we need to hear.” So they came over to the clinic making an important appearance. That made an impression with the people. They all knew we were not Catholics, but Protestants, and it didn’t matter.

That was a dramatic change in that village, the priests coming over and shepherding us, and us participating in their church services [except the communion]. Padre Miguel, who had been the bedside nurse, lived with his head in heaven and his feet on the earth. It is just the way he was. He would come over in that pickup truck and park in front of the clinic.

There was only one tree in front. The tree was about six or eight inches wide at the shoulder. It wasn’t a big tree but big enough. He would park in the same place every day, next to that tree. His door would open just enough for him to get out, because of that tree. He would wiggle and work his way out of the truck. The next day, he would park it in exactly the same spot. He appeared to never remember the previous day’s wiggles. He was a lover of people and had his focus on the Lord. The kids loved him and he played soccer with them. He was a simple person, meaning that the kingdom of God was uncomplicated to him.

We weren’t there at the time of this next event. Several summers after he had lovingly nursed my patient, he was playing soccer on a team with the kids. They had gone to a nearby village to play and were all hot and probably super-heated. Coming back, they all dove into the river and Padre Miguel never came back up. God took him. I would venture to say that he was the perfect priest and the perfect nurse.

Every day, all day long, was an experience. Gustavo talked to us about going out into the villages. They had asked us to come and sometimes would send mounts for us to ride so we wouldn’t have to walk. One horse, one donkey and one mule.

The first time we went out, Gustavo just wanted to show us around the area. We had no appointments and no one was expecting us. We left riding horseback around noon and followed the trail through the valleys. By the time we got up on a hill overlooking the village, it was getting along towards evening. We looked down at the village from a rise, and decided it was time to head back. It had been a bouncy ride on that horse. As a country boy I had been accustomed to riding a tractor, not horseback. Those Mexican saddles were wooden and covered with one thin layer of leather. My rear end was the padding. I said, “Gustavo, is there a shorter way back?”

“We can go through the mountains. It is a shorter way back, but it will get dark and we don’t have a light.”

My reply was spoken as much out of desperation as in faith. I said,

“Gustavo, God will give us light,” and we headed up into the mountains.

It got dark early because the clouds closed in. It started raining and lightning. It wasn’t just an occasional lightning bolt but an electrical storm. There were the three of us, Bob, me and Gustavo, in that order riding the trail, with Gustavo leading. It got so dark that we couldn’t see each other except when lightning struck. We talked and sang so we would know how close to stay. Our mounts followed one another. A couple of times the horses stopped. Gustavo would get off and feel around on the ground. Both times there was a cliff drop-off and the trail had turned. The horses knew that, so they had stopped. Gustavo would work us back onto the trail.

Then the lightning really started. There was no shortage of light. We got back into town by God’s light.

Another time, there were five of us with five mounts that were brought from a village. We stayed there a couple of days. Three of the ladies, Gustavo and I went. I don’t know if this particular man was the official leader of the village, but he was a tall guy with real bearing, a real class type of person. We stayed at his house, and when you stayed at someone’s house, they moved out of the bed. You took it and stayed in their bed, no arguing. Bed bugs and all. They weren’t “beds” but were wooden frames with a lacework of leather. You laid on that covered with whatever was necessary for the temperature.

In that village, I made my first public speech, in Spanish of course, to all of the men who gathered. I could see that they understood what I was saying because they laughed where I laughed. I turned to Gustavo occasionally for help because he had practiced hearing and speaking English. He would give me a few words and I used them.

But the man of the house, that principle person, lay down and showed me an inguinal hernia in his groin. When he stood up, the hernia fell through the opening in his abdominal wall and was about the size of a football. When he lay back down, it fell back into place in his abdomen, mostly. The hernia wasn’t hindering his life much but he wanted it fixed. It would have been major surgery requiring mesh, and more. He asked me to fix it.

I thought I’ll make short work of this impossible request. I began by telling him the first reason why I couldn’t.

“I have no anesthetic, nothing to put you to sleep.”

I thought that would do it, but was insulted. In Spanish, of course, he said,

“I lay down; you cut.”

So God had called my bluff on that. Not having an anesthetic wasn’t good enough reason for him. I told him it was too much of a surgery, too big. He needed to go to the city to get a good surgeon in a hospital for his operation. At that, he accepted my excuses.

Those people were good patients. Some had never seen a doctor before. They came in with all sorts of diseases and conditions, including active pulmonary tuberculosis. I knew they were coughing germs, coughing TB, but we came prepared for it. We had injectable streptomycin to be administered every day, plus the proper oral medicines. Before we left, some of those severely ill people who were going down, down, down in their health were now going up, up, up. I have no idea how far up they went or if they died months or years later, but they benefitted from our love and care and really appreciated us.

We had all kinds of intestinal worms; ALL types. Some of the kids were coughing worms from their intestines, up through the stomach, esophagus and out their mouth. You have to be careful that you don’t kill all the worms at one time when people have that many. Medicine will kill them all at one time, the worms will form a mass that will cause an intestinal obstruction, and the patient will die. So you have to titer your medicine doses a bit, kill a few worms at first, then later maybe a few more. That’s difficult to do in those isolated and one visit circumstances out in the mountains. That was the most common illness we treated, worms. One man was upset about his wife’s treatment for her worms. She had an ill-response from the medicine, because of which he was ready to fight. Because of great need for good communication and understanding, Gustavo took care of the grievance.

One of our most unique patients was an older lady who had never been to a doctor. We weren’t even in a village but were at Gustavo’s rancho in the country. She came from much further than that and her family had brought her. Her eyes were all reddened and infected but she needed more than an ophthalmic antibiotic ointment. The cause of her problem was that her eyelids were inverted [rolled inward] causing her eyelashes to continually irritate her eyes. We assigned our wives the job of plucking out her lashes, gave her family the tweezers, gave the family instructions on eye lash plucking and the application of eye ointment, and told the family to keep her well.

So many people had to walk a couple of days with gunshot wounds or machete cuts from being in fights. If we hadn’t been there, they wouldn’t have bothered to try to see a doctor.

One man was brought in on a litter. It had been a couple of days since he had been shot in the abdomen. He needed surgery, hospitalization and antibiotics. Lots of stuff! We used Gustavo’s truck and one of our mattresses for an ambulance and drove him to Tuxtla to a hospital. The doctors saw him in the emergency room and wrote prescriptions for his antibiotics. We purchased the medicines at a public pharmacy because patients had to buy their own medicines and take them to the hospital. We got it all started and went back home. About a month or two later, he and his family came by and really thanked us for saving his life. Medically, we hadn’t done anything. But we had been his family.

Carolyn, our nurse, was hopeful that she would get to practice all this rare, special medical care but she hadn’t yet had any really exciting thing happen. Finally, one day the friendly local doctor across the street asked her if she could help him with a surgery. A man had been badly cut up with a machete and he needed her as his surgical nurse to help sew him up. That was the highlight of her summer. She got in on some real trauma.

Living in a third world country, if you are there to give of yourself, it is very rewarding. After taking the clinic down the first summer, as we were about to leave, the friendly Mexican doctor, Dr. Juan, even began going to church. We got really close. He got close to all of us including our two senoritas. He was married and had a family. He was a good guy and appreciated the companionship of those on his professional and social level, I suppose. He warmed up and relaxed. When we weren’t there, we gave all our supplies and equipment to him. We had trained two local girls, one to be a lab tech and one to be a nurse. They went to work for him, so he had a much better equipped clinic than previously. And he had the staff. God formed another community. The Holy Spirit always brings people together and fits them properly whether it is two or more. When His parts are available, He makes us one – a functional unit.

Then the state, the National Health Service, came to town and established a clinic with one doctor. Therefore, our clinic for the poor wasn’t necessary. And neither was Dr. Juan. He went to work for the state in an office medical position.

The other doctor, who always was hostile to us because we were seeing some of his patients, knew we didn’t have a license to practice medicine in Mexico. He complained to the state medical office in Tuxtla. I didn’t know this until we got a letter saying something like,

“It has been reported that you are practicing medicine without a license. Would you please come to these offices at your earliest convenience?”

I showed the letter to Dr. Juan. He said,

“Oh, I know what that is about. He [the other doctor] has turned you in. You write them a letter saying, ‘Thank you for your letter that we have received,’ and tell them that you will indeed be there at your earliest convenience. Then you forget it. I’ll go by to see them.” The state didn’t really want to take action against me, but they had to do something because the other doctor had complained. Dr. Juan said,

“You write the letter and I’ll take care of it.”

For an additional reason it was good that Dr. Juan had gone to work for the state health service in Tuxtla. He got a letter for me, signed by the chief doctor in the state, stating that I and any doctor with me could practice medicine in the state at anytime. I didn’t even ask the Lord of Dr. Juan for that blessing, but I had been given little friends in high enough places. Dr. Juan became a little doctor in high places.

(Nancy) The first summer we four [Bob, me and the two ladies] were in La Concordia my job was to shop, cook, do laundry, and get to know people, so my Spanish improved very much. I had taken Spanish in high school and college so I had some good ground work in the native language. It was poor quality but that actually helped in our situation. I it made me look more common, not so “American smarty.” For example, I accidentally said the wrong number when someone asked the ages of my children. I told them my oldest son was 50 instead of 15. All that caused was warm laughter.

I went around town shopping. The way you know where to go to shop is you go to this house for eggs and that house for meat. You don’t buy milk. I learned that when you buy meat, you go to the square and look around for a long cane pole with a flag. Pink flags meant pork and you didn’t want that one. You looked for the red flag because it meant beef. You walked to the red flag and then looked around again. You would see another flag on a cane pole and you’d walk toward and from it until you found a house that had killed beef the day before or early that same day. If you didn’t take your own container for receiving the beef, they very nicely gave me some papers to put it in. After that happened once, I knew to take my own containers.

The beef was very tough and had been butchered out in the back yard where all the flies were. With their machete they chopped up the meat on a tree stump. We just cooked it very well done and tenderized it. We didn’t eat a lot of beef. Chicken was bought the same way.

Once I was given a whole chicken. When patients didn’t have any money, they were generous and would bring fruit -- marvelous, fresh fruit ripened on the trees. But one day, someone brought a live chicken. I had lessons from my mother about what to do but I didn’t want to. I “chickened out” and carried it across the street to the doctor’s house where he had two maids who knew what to do with the chicken. I asked if they would take care of the chicken for me. They did. They brought it back to me ready to cook.

Visiting went on between the patients and me, too. One lady just kept coming day after day. She wasn’t sick, but she wanted to visit. She would bring a new fruit from her trees to validate the reason why she was coming; purely a social visit.

People asked about my family, which was a great topic for conversation. When they learned that I had five children, they couldn’t believe it.

“But you’re chico [trim]! You’re not gordo [fat].” They expected a woman to get fatter with every baby, and they usually did. Bob suggested that I start an exercise class, so I did. My class met up on the second floor veranda, hidden away where no one could see them. Some of the ladies were pretty big Mamas.

Not the first summer but the next summer, our son Ben was in diapers, which is another story about traveling and living in Mexico in those years of no disposables. Our two other young boys went also. Dan and Jay were 5 and 10 years old, somewhere in that area. They had a ball. We were in town, not on a ranch, that summer. The little boys in town would chase the wild pigs. People let their pigs run loose and no one would bother anyone else’s pig. The pig would go home at feeding time. You just had pigs in the street and little kids played the game of chasing pigs. Pigs went home just like chickens go home. Jay said that was more fun getting to chase pigs and wrestle them to the ground.

The first summer we went to La Concordia, people in the church in Houston had taken care of our kids. One of the ladies of the church had moved into our house and was herself the mother of a 1-yr old, and there were additional adult family members. Our older sons, both teenagers, didn’t go with us. They lived with another of our church family while we were gone for the summer. They came home when we got back. In the church, we were real family.

On a later trip we went, not just to the town but past the town, to the other end of the lake that had filled in by that time. Gustavo had a rancho located a long boat ride from our previous location, La Concordia. Besides, La Concordia was now under water in the lake. So we stayed on the rancho way back away from everywhere. Jay worked in the clinic’s lab doing needed jobs. Dan was compadre with Daniel, Gustavo’s oldest son, rounding up cattle, chasing down chickens or whatever. Another American doctor was with us on that trip with his wife and two children. Ben and the other doctor’s son played and had a ball that summer. It was a very different experience for them.

Dan and Jay went on a very brave hike up a mountain and got lost coming back down. With the aid of some men of questionable character they found their way back before dark, having had an adventure they well remember.

There were two trips where we and others stayed for a couple of months. Bob’s other trips were shorter. One was one month and some were one or two week trips.

I [Bob] recall some of the driving occasions down there. The Lord got pickup loads and carloads of personal items and clinic equipment and medicines through the Mexican customs. Other people gave us stuff that they couldn’t get through. The Lord got us through with it. Our commitment was to righteousness. We were never going to pay bribes to get anything through. Even a Catholic ministry couldn’t get their stuff through. They gave it to us and the Lord got through.

We would pull our vehicle into a Mexican customs station. A uniformed agent would come out and inspect things. Everything they opened and looked at was just our personal clothes, which were permissible. They never opened any of the lab or medicine boxes. We would go right through, checked place after place.

One summer when Mark, a Texas doctor, and I were flying to La Concordia, we got on the airplane in Dallas. We asked the Lord for somebody to sit with who would hear our testimony. We sat by an attorney from Atlanta, Georgia, who was a young, single man going to Mexico for a little vacation time. We struck up a conversation with him and said,

“You’re going to have a good time in Mexico City.”

Showing his unbelief he said, “Yeah.”

“Oh, yeah” I responded. There are things to do there!”

Again his unbelieving, “Yeah.”

No matter how we encouraged him about his trip, we perceived that no matter what, he wasn’t going to have a good time.

We started telling him about the Lord, our lives, our ministry in Mexico, and how He had always gotten our things through customs. In this case, flying into Mexico City, we had a large suitcase full of quart jars with many thousands of pills. We told him that the Lord was going to get our stuff through Customs again this time, and that he could watch it happen. We told him how, on a previous trip, the Lord had had an American Consulate employee pick up our luggage instead of theirs, and that consulate employees’ luggage do not go through Customs inspection. When the American Consulate employee learned of the mistake he called the airline, learned of our hotel location and had our luggage full of “contraband” taken to our hotel room by courier, without customs inspection.

We told him,

“You watch as the Lord gets the suitcases currently on this plane, full of medicines, through Customs.”

“OK,” He said, starting to perk up.

We went together through immigration and got our suitcases off the rack as they came off the plane. We got in this long line of people to get up to the customs agent, who was opening all of the luggage. We were still probably eight or ten people back from the customs counter. It was going to be a long while yet. We stood with our luggage. Then, beyond the customs officer, I noticed a uniformed airport employee. He looked right at me, pointed at me, wiggled his finger [for me to come to him] and said something. I nodded my head in the affirmative. He waved me to him. We picked up our suitcases, walked right past everyone, and were put in a taxi. We were gone.

I have no idea what that was all about, but I had engaged with that airport employee the way he had engaged with me and we were out of there. As the three of us walked past the busy customs agent, our friend from Atlanta excitedly said, “He did it! He did it!”

Another time through customs I had with me my fairly new banjo. I had been learning to play it and was looking forward to some practice time over the summer. I got up to the customs counter and the agent said,

“What’s this?”

“That’s my banjo.”

When you play the banjo for awhile, you get a few calluses on your fingers and he said, “Oh, no. You’re bringing this in to sell.”

“No, that’s my personal banjo. I play it. See?”

I held my hand up to him with my finger tips pointed toward him. If someone had been watching it would have looked liked I was arguing with him and sticking my fingers in his face. He might have thought the same, because he didn’t even look at my fingers. I don’t think he fully understood me, and perhaps wrongly thought the usual. Choosing to not argue, he simply closed the banjo case and said, “Pass.”

That reminds me of what the Lord had told me before our initial visit. He said that we would encounter some missionaries in an airport and there would be a financial problem. Coming out that first trip, Bob and I had spent our last cent. But we had paid for everything of our return, including our tickets. We were leaving southern Mexico with our tickets only, and empty pockets. As we walked through the airport lobby in Tuxtla I noticed several American-type people gathered together, talking. I introduced myself and had a brief conversation. They were missionaries. I stepped up to the counter and gave the employee our names. He said,

“That will be $4.00 each.”

“But we paid everything before we left Houston.”

“This is the airport fee. $4.00 each. You can’t get on the plane unless you pay the fee.”

I didn’t have any money. Not even a penny.

As a simple statement of faith, knowing that we were going to get on that airplane, I told the man behind the counter, “I’m going to get on that plane.” In a softened and semi-pleading voice, he said,

“Don’t get on; I’ll have to pay it if you get on.”

I perceived his dilemma, so said almost apologetically, “Oh, I didn’t mean that.”

All of a sudden, the Lord reminded me, “airport, missionary, financial need.” I had not realized it was going to be my financial problem! I thought it was going to be the missionary’s financial problem. I stepped back a few feet to the missionary and told him,

“We need $8 for our airport fee. Would you happen to have $8?”

“Sure.”

We got his information and sent the money back to him, “with interest.” The Lord just did little things like that.

PART 8

I did not know what God was going to do in the village, and that was one of the things I told the priests from the start. I knew that there would be some changes in the village as a result from our being there, but that God would do them. I would not do them, God would. I told him,

“We are God’s people and we will be acting like God’s people, doing what He wants, so we will be in submission to you. However, things will change.”

They accepted that. I guess they knew that a lot of things needed changing.

The reason for a third, short trip before we took the clinic the first summer, was that I was concerned about the local Bishop and whichever other authorities might give grief to those priests in La Concordia. I did not know exactly what to do about it but I thought I might go to wherever the Bishop was and start fellowship and brotherly sharing with him. So flying down, Bob and I were in the airport in Mexico City. It was a large waiting area for again preparing to get on the Constellation airplane. There were about 40 of us. I noticed among us someone who appeared to be a Mexican priest. He had on his black suit and his white clerical collar.

I was interested in him and watched him a little bit. Then, and it’s the only time I have physically felt God’s hand touch me, as I was looking at that priest, somebody, and it was the Lord, put their hand in the middle of my back and gave me a firm shove, so much so that my neck bent backwards, as did my shoulders. I was actually pushed over towards that man. I went up to him and started a conversation. He was not a Mexican but an Italian. In fact, he was the Papal Nuncio, the Vatican’s ambassador to Mexico. We had quite a nice conversation while waiting there. We agreed to sit together on the plane, and did. For the two hours of the flight Bob and I shared what God was doing in La Concordia and back in Houston, Texas and in our personal lives. The Papal Nuncio would then share what God was doing with him and all the way up to what God was doing in Rome. In all cases, it was the same type of Holy Spirit work and human awareness of it. This was a good brother.

During that flight, I noticed through the window that we were flying above a steady cloud cover that was only broken from time to time by a mountaintop sticking up through the clouds. I knew the landing strip at that little airport had a mountain on one end and a ravine on the other end. All the pilot had was a beam to help lead that plane to the airport, then they were on their own. The pilot would circle the beam, come down through the clouds aligned with the airstrip, and land. As we got closer to the airport, I shared that bit of information with the bishop.

We arrived over the airport. The pilot made a big circle and dropped down into the clouds, but before we came out underneath, he gunned his engines and came back up. I knew that the pilot had not liked his approach. I also noticed that the bishop was a little nervous. Again, the pilot tightened up the circle, dropped down into the clouds, but again before coming out underneath the clouds he gunned his engines and came back up. This time, the bishop was really showing his nervousness. I leaned over shoulder to shoulder with him and said, “Bishop, isn’t it good to know that as sons of God, we have already passed from death into life, and that if our Father wants to plant us on that mountainside that is o.k. with us.” With a sigh he said, “Yes,” and rested. Faith reigned because he was a man of faith. On the third attempt the pilot brought the plane down through the clouds aligned with the runway and landed with ease.

I had told the bishop everything we were doing in La Concordia and how the priests had welcomed us, which seemed to please him, too. I spoke of my concern for the local priests. He said,

“I have not been down here to Tuxtla before so there may be a welcoming committee at the airport. If the local bishop is there, I will introduce you.”

[Both the bishop and the governor were there, by the way.] It would be a gigantic plus to have that kind of introduction to the bishop. Sure enough, as the plane pulled up and stopped its motors, a large crowd of people came out beside the plane. The marimbas were playing. It was a real celebration!

We let everybody get off the plane and out of our way. The bishop walked down the ladder. Bob and I were standing at the top taking it all in. People were greeting him, bowing to him, kissing his ring of office of the Roman Catholic Church.

Then he stopped everything and motioned to us. He announced his American friends who were doing this good work in La Concordia. He welcomed us and then he introduced us to the local bishop. What was the bishop to do – probably what he would have done otherwise.

A man from the Tuxtla radio station was there with a cassette tape recorder and a microphone. I stepped up to the bishop and he welcomed me. I could understand that. He may have already heard about us in some other way, I do not know. The bishop and I had a conversation. I don’t exactly know what he said, but I responded in my broken Spanish. He spoke and I responded, and “whew,” it was over. That conversation was broadcast all over the state. They heard it down in La Concordia and not only did they hear we were coming again, but that the bishop and the Papal Nuncio from the Pope had welcomed us to La Concordia!

The Papal Nuncio received us warmly in his Mexico City home once or twice. I asked if I could send him our monthly newsletter from the church, containing teachings, announcements, and other things going on in our community of faith. He said, “Yes!” and we sent them to him. At that point, I had no further personal contact with him, but three or four years later I was in our church’s office in Houston and noticed on the administrator’s desk a change of address request for Padre Del Maestri, the Papal Nuncio from Mexico, then in Canada. He had stepped up a notch nation-wise and was requesting that our newsletter be sent to him in Canada.

So that’s a good brother, meaning that we had nothing divisive between us. He became a cardinal and has since gone to be with the Lord. He was a good brother; God’s man. The Lord really saw to it that we got together.

On one of those three preparatory visits, I think it was on the first one, Bob and I realized one evening that we had gotten to know many people all over and around town. But right there on the square was an adobe building and eight to ten soldiers – the local billet of the Mexican Army. There was always one soldier out in front with his gun. La Concordia was the closest village to Mexico’s border with Guatemala.

This one evening, we decided to go visit the soldiers. It was a little after dark. We walked up to the front of the building. The soldier then on duty held up his gun, muzzle upward, and said, “Halt!” The sergeant came out. It turned out that there were six or eight privates and one sergeant. The sergeant said something and thumbed us into the building. He left no doubt that it was a command. We followed him in. He had a little wooden table, maybe two feet by three feet in size, with several folding-type wooden chairs. They set up two chairs on our side of the table and we sat down. The sergeant placed a writing pad on the table, with a flourish took his pencil out of his pocked, and looked at us -- officially looked at us. He asked for our names. I understood quite clearly what he wanted. I said, as clearly as I could with my best Spanish accent, “Doctor Roberto Eckert.” I did not know how to say or translate Eckert into Spanish. He did well slowly spelling “Doctor,” then had some trouble spelling Roberto. One of the privates helped him with one of the letters. That appeared to really insult him, that someone, a private at that, had to help him with spelling in front of the Americans.

He had the little trouble with Roberto, but I could see “Eckert” coming like a train down the tracks. When he had finished with Roberto he looked at me, poised his pencil and I said,

“Eckert. “E …” and he wrote the letter “I.” I had forgotten that in Spanish the letter “E” is pronounced “A,” and that the letter “I” is pronounced “E.” I corrected myself by saying, “Not ‘E,’ but ‘A.’” He looked at me very suspiciously. He knew I had said “E.” Very gently I offered to write it for him but he quickly blew me off on the offer. I saw that this soldier had a pride issue. It was like he was imprisoned. Then, what began to work inside of me was compassion for what was going on inside of him. We worked on my name until it was properly written. Then he asked,

“What is your mission?”

Mexico was building one of the biggest dams on the continent on one of the biggest rivers on the continent, the Grijalva River. Construction of the dam was not far away from La Concordia. Gradually I understood that he thought we were spying on their dam project. So, to him, this was an interrogative investigation. The language problem was almost impossible. He thought I was hiding my identity and purpose, lying to him. We got to a place in the questioning where we were all standing. I do not know why we were standing, but it had something to do with the increasing tension. He grew more and more sure that I knew Spanish and was hiding it. He “knew” I was some sort of spy. He was wrong, and I knew that, as the pressure built, he was going to have to do something official about me. He put his finger in my face and said in Spanish,

“Speak Spanish!”

One of my few and most perfect sentences in Spanish was, “No hablo espanol,” which didn’t convince him one little bit since I said it really well. Again, with his finger still in my face, he said,

“Speak Spanish!”

I was thinking of what I could do to help him out of the corner he had worked himself into. Bob was standing next to me. I turned to him for help, knowing that he knew a few more Spanish words than I did. We had counted our Spanish words before leaving Texas. I had about 20; he had about 30, so I asked him for help. The sergeant would have none of that! He shook his head, “No!” Once again, using the same finger for emphasis, he said,

“Speak Spanish!”

I figured it was the last time he was going to say that. Next he would have to do something. Compassion welled up in me for him. I knew he had to do something that he had not planned on. No longer was he going to be able to do “nothing.” His “something” would make things worse. We lived and breathed God’s kingdom and ours was God’s work. He was about to get into trouble. To that point I had been unable to get him out of it or to reduce his pressure.

Bob, who was pretty hefty and pretty broad, decided he was out of it. The sergeant wouldn’t let him do or say anything so he sat back down on his chair. That wooden folding chair more than collapsed; it splintered into a hundred pieces. Wood went all over the room! By this time all the soldiers had gathered around and were intensely interested in the whole proceeding.

I looked down at my brother Bob who was lying flat on his back with wood spread out all over the room. There was total silence. Then the Lord placed a series of sounds in my mind. I accepted them from God and just blurted them out. Everybody laughed! The sergeant laughed and when he laughed, I laughed. We all just laughed for awhile. They got Bob another chair. All of us sat back down. The sergeant and everyone were now in a lighthearted mood. We gradually but easily worked through everything else that he asked about us. Occasionally, someone would re-start some chuckles about the situation and all of us would enjoy another round of laughter. It would break out every once in awhile. Hmmm. God is God.

We finished the official work. Things were going so good that I asked if anyone had a guitar. One of the soldiers did, and he knew how to play it quite well. We went out onto the veranda, the sergeant sat down and offered us a chair, and the soldiers gathered around. The guitarist got his guitar and I asked him to follow my singing.

The only songs that Bob and I knew were about Jesus. So Bob and I sang about Jesus and the soldier picked it up quickly. We sang a couple of songs and then they would sing a couple of songs. Their songs were all beer joint-type songs. Then they would turn to us and want us to sing, so we sang some more about Jesus.

After a little while, the sergeant said, in Spanish, and I understood him,

“Are you Protestants?”

He had this serious look on his face. They don’t use the word “Protestants” but instead use the word “Evangelistos.” I knew that we were not what he was asking, so I said “No.” I told him we were catholic, which was a good thing for Protestants to remember. A Protestant is a catholic, too, especially if his heart and work are right with any Catholic authority in their area. It was easy for me to tell him that. It was true in my heart, true in my actions, and because I was an Anglican Catholic, an Episcopalian. So it was easy and truthful. We resumed singing songs back and forth to each other.

The morning we left La Concordia the Lord added on another wonderful thing with the soldiers. There was a man in town, Gustavo, who had a flatbed truck with sideboards. He told us he was going to give us a ride to the river, only a couple of miles away. We climbed aboard. Then Gustavo drove to the soldiers’ billet. Four soldiers and the sergeant got on the truck with us. They were well dressed and had their guns. When we arrived at the river we got out, got our gear off the truck and, sure enough, there was that dugout canoe ready to carry us across. The soldiers lined up on the river bank and aimed their guns in the air. They didn’t fire but they gave us a silent military departure. The sergeant said twice to me, moving his hand from his forehead to his heart, to describe his words,

“You will always be in my head [memory] and in my heart.”

Obviously God did this but He went way beyond the obvious. Who but God knows from that point and beyond what happened in that sergeant’s and those soldiers’ lives? God knows; that’s enough. I’ll know, one of these days. I’ll meet the sergeant once again.

I was 38 years old at that time. It was 1968. On our first of 3 preliminary visits, the 3-week trip, we had landed at the airport in Mexico City and collected our bags. As we were going through customs, we were talking about getting a ride and finding a hotel. The Lord said, “I have a man of My own choosing to pick you up.” I shared that with Bob. We wondered, “OK, what’s our part in that?”

We each had one suitcase. There was a big parking lot at the airport. We decided to stand on the sidewalk where the parking lot exited onto the street, and await God’s chosen man. We stood there; cars drove by. I remember that I would look at each driver. We thought we were making it easy for God’s man to notice us and to pick us up. We thought we were helping God, which in a way is a good thing to do – if it is an act of being available to God. As each car drove by I would look at the driver, perhaps meaning to catch his eye. I never did, and they continued driving by us. After a little while, perhaps 15 minutes, both of us knew that something was wrong. This was taking too long for God. That is not what we had learned to expect from Him. We would have been glad to stand there all day, but we felt like something was wrong.

Then we realized that we were “helping” God too much. He had said, “I have a man of my own choosing to take you.” I had been ready to make sure that the man of God’s choosing didn’t miss us. As if the Lord needed some help, I was ready to do something like stick up my thumb or wave to the driver. I realized that all of that was in unbelief. God had said He had this person to take us, so we decided to trust Him by stopping our added efforts and just stand there.

It was less than a minute later. I was facing the parking lot and Bob was facing me and the street outside the parking lot. He said,

“Look at that guy out there parked on the street.” On the street there was angled-in parking. About five or six cars outside the exit a man had one leg already inside his car and one foot still on the pavement. He was waving his hands at us. I turned around, saw the situation, and said, “Come on, Bob, that’s God’s man!” We picked up our bags, made our introductions, and loaded the bags into his car. He was a Campbell Soup salesman and had been in the airport doing his business. He spoke great English and asked where we wanted to go. I told him we wanted a nice room at a reasonably-priced hotel for the night because we had to fly out the next day.

He toured us around Mexico City for a bit, and then took us to the hotel where he ordinarily stayed. It was a nice 3-story hotel, but not up to the standards of an American Holiday Inn. It was about 9:00 at night when we arrived. He helped us check in because the clerk behind the desk didn’t speak any English. That should have alerted me that God was doing something again, right on the spot.

As we were checking in, the Lord told me to talk to that man [the desk clerk]. I asked our friendly soup salesman, as he was getting ready to leave,

“Would you ask him if he has some time to sit over here on the couch and talk to us?”

The clerk agreed because there was nothing going on in the hotel that night. We sat down, our friend left, and it was just like back in La Concordia when the Lord had taken the only person out of town who knew how to speak some English. God had also now removed our English-speaking friend. I sat down on the couch and started on my Spanish. I couldn’t understand anything he said. He wasn’t really “engaged” with us, anyway. He was just being friendly because we had asked.

We sat there a couple of minutes and were working on what to say next when a Mexican man came in the door. During this time in 1968, the Olympics were going on in Mexico City. This man was on the Mexican weight-lifting team and had lost out on the first day of competition. He was drunk. I mean he was really loaded, but he spoke good English. He came over and plopped down in one of the chairs near us. When I perceived that he spoke English, I thought, “Ah; God has provided us with an interpreter!” Additionally, I said to myself, “Such as he is.” So I asked him if he would interpret for me and the hotel clerk. He readily agreed.

I said something to the clerk about the Lord. My interpreter answered me instead of passing it on to the clerk. I said, “No, tell him,” and he did. I said something else and my interpreter again gave his own response. Again I said, “Tell him,” and so he did. But when he responded he responded not for the hotel clerk but for himself.

I got it! I shifted my conversation to the interpreter. The clerk disappeared as soon as he could. My inebriated new friend understood quickly that I was talking about the Lord and blasted the church at large. He blasted the church where we needed to be blasted. He didn’t hold back anything that he thought. His drunken stupor helped him really lay it on the church. I kept saying,

“You’re right,” because he was right.

It was hard to get into a conversation because he wasn’t letting up. Every once in awhile, I said,

“You are absolutely right. You are putting your hand right on what we need to hear in the church.” He went on for over an hour. The only thing I could get into the conversation was what I was supposed to get in -- the truth, deferring to him, and letting him say what he needed to say. I said only, “You are right.”

As he wound down he became totally sober. Then I began to talk to him about what God wants, meaning that people would become like sheep towards Jesus. I began to describe what it means to be a sheep. I said,

“It’s nothing like you see in the church. What you are longing for is the real thing!”

I shared Bible teaching and testimony about what it meant to be a sheep of God. He relaxed and drank in Life. He responded and was as sober as could be. Getting to that hotel was child’s play for the Lord. Getting that brother was important stuff. God was after the fellow who was right about what he knew of the church. He was right and he needed someone to tell him he was right. He needed someone to listen to him and then tell him what else was right.

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(This portion of tape was about Nancy accompanying you in the summer of 1969, and about the two young ladies who went, also. ) NANCY: “We flew that time, just you and I.”

Gustavo had us set up with hotel rooms that were empty. Our clinic was in one room downstairs and we lived in three rooms upstairs. Gustavo, who worked with us, taught another local, a single girl, to do what he did. Because the two were locals who knew all of the people, they could adjust our charges according to the patients’ ability to pay. I said that the people who have money should pay something. People who don’t have any money pay nothing.

So he had a system. He would make the charges and would say, “Poor, (pobre), moderate(medio), and rich (rico) .” Noone was rich but we labeled as rich those who could afford to pay our very low top rate. We had people lined up all day. We took off of work like everyone else did for a couple of hours in the middle of the day for lunch and a siesta.

We had Bible studies among ourselves and didn’t teach the Bible to any with the locals, but God’s Presence began to change things in that town of about 4000 people. We had been there for a month or more when one afternoon the church bell rang and rang. We were accustomed to the bell ringing briefly three times a day to announce church services but this day the bell rang and rang. I asked why the bell was ringing. Gustavo said it was because someone had died. I said,

“But this is the first time it’s rung since we’ve been here.”

“This is the first time someone has died since you’ve been here.”

I thought to myself, “We hadn’t been treating many life-threatening diseases.” God had done it Himself. As if reading my mind, Gustavo apologized by saying, “But she was an old woman. It was time for her to die.”

We were always saying, “God’s Word says” or “the Bible says” and then we would simply paraphrase what the Word said. The people began going to the priests and asking them to teach them the Bible. So, the priests started Bible studies. We didn’t do it. The priests, Gods’ local shepherds, taught them.

One summer, we were working one fairly hot day and the air conditioning went out, way out. Actually, there was no air conditioning anywhere in town. The head priest came in and patiently waited while I finished seeing my current patient. I had others waiting but I asked him what he wanted. He started telling me about a priest who was stationed elsewhere in the state whose main ministry was riding horseback to visit all the nearby colonias -- all the little villages. He preached the gospel, taught the Bible, prayed for people and by their report had a very effective ministry. They said he was an important man in God’s work.

While he talked, I wondered why he was telling me about this. Then he told me,

“He got sick and went to Tuxtla where he’s been for a couple of weeks, being treated by those doctors. He’s getting worse.” I knew that a lot of those doctors were American graduates. If they didn’t know what was wrong with him and their treatment wasn’t helping, he must be very sick. Soon it began to dawn on me what he was about to ask:

“Could we bring him down to La Concordia and will you treat him?”

There was no way I could tell him “No” so I said, “Yes.” He said,

“He’s outside waiting.”

He was a young priest about 30 years old, waiting in the hot sun, in his long black robe. He was leaning against the building in order to stand up. We got him into the clinic. I told my lab tech, who was just a teenage girl,

“Do every test that we can do. Do them all.”

This is because we had very simple blood, urine and stool tests. Our top lab technologist back at the clinic in Houston had taught her in a couple of months how to do those simple tests. Though she had never done lab work before, she did well with what she had been taught.

I had no idea what tests had been done on him in Tuxtla. I didn’t know the treatment they had been using. I was flying in the dark as a doctor. One thing I had done, within a year of coming down to La Concordia, had been to fly from Houston to Mexico City to attend a Doctors’ International Meeting on Diseases in Mexico. When I saw that seminar offered, I knew that I wanted to get into it. The meeting refreshed me on diseases I hadn’t heard anything about since graduating from medical school.

I did a complete examination and considered what the young priest could have, then made my diagnosis. I knew that with the serious condition he was in, we had time for one diagnosis and its intense treatment. That was all the time we had. The head priest took him to the rectory and put him to bed. My nurse went over and started IV fluids with two antibiotics – two potent antibiotics. I hoped that what he had was an infection. Those antibiotics wouldn’t help anything else. We hydrated him with fluids and electrolytes; and we began to love him with our hearts and medicines.

The assistant full-time priest became his continual bedside nurse, applying cold rags to his forehead, patting him, helping in any way he could. He didn’t know anything medically, but what he did was perfect. He hovered over him, prayed for and talked to him. I went over a couple of times that day. I told the priest in charge,

“We don’t have many tests, but I am going to treat him for what I think is wrong with him. I don’t know how it’s going to turn out.”

The priest assured me that there was no pressure on me.

“If he lives, he lives. If he dies, he dies. It will be God who decides. You will not be responsible if he dies.” I certainly agreed that he was in God’s care. I went to see him again a couple of times the next day and he was worse each time. That evening I prayed,

“Lord, if You don’t heal him, tomorow may be the day he dies.”

I went to see him the next morning, and he was bad. Always when I went to see him, the priests were gathered together. I told them it was bad. They already knew it. I said,

“I’m going to do like in the Bible. I’m going to lay my hands on him and pray for him and ask God to do a miracle.”

That didn’t surprise them. They were men of faith. Their only response was to ask if I was going to pray in Spanish or English. I responded, “In English, because I’m going to have to speak deeply from my heart. I put my hands on him and started praying. I hadn’t said a sentence of my prayer when it seemed like the Lord gently said, “Stop.” So I stopped, and listened. The Lord began to show me something about my self. He had often showed me diagnoses and treatments since I had begun to walk with Him, but this was not what He now talked to me about.

The Lord began to show me what was not going on between me and the nurse. Both the lab tech and the nurse were single gals, but the nurse was in her 30’s and had never married. God showed me that I was professional with her but not very brotherly. He wanted the two of us to have a much closer relationship, for me to be warmer towards her and more open.

Then He began to impress upon me how my not being warm towards her had affected her adversely. I was surprised at first but when He showed me the effect on her, I began to cry. (You should see us now when we greet each other. Many hug one another, but when we hug she says, “I’m your nurse” and I say, “I’m your doctor.”) When she came to the Church of the Redeemer she was a very damaged person, but long before now she has been healed and matured. She has been an intensive care nurse in a Houston hospital, then a public school nurse. She was healed and became a very capable person.

So the Lord broke my heart. Then He ended what He had to say and do; just not saying anymore. It was done. I dried my tears, not knowing what the priests may have thought. They could not have had any idea what was going on between me and the Lord. I did think I needed to finish my prayer since it had been interrupted so I finished in about 15-20 seconds and said “Amen.” That part was superfluous, actually. That was all, and I left.

When I went back the next time, that evening or the next morning, the patient was entirely different. Tragically different! He had no fever, but in fact, he had a couple of degrees below normal temperature. Instead of being red and hot, his skin was grey and cold. A doctor doesn’t like to see that in a patient. Commonly, it meant that death was near. Then I had a thought.

The Lord reminded me of something I learned in medical school. One of those antibiotics, when given to babies, can cause in a few babies what is called, “grey disease.” I have never heard of it presenting in an adult, and had never seen it in my practice, but I decided that God had healed him and now the medicine was doing him in. I stopped his medicine.

The next day when I came over, he was up and going. Three days later the two resident priests left on a trip, having been delayed because of the situation. They left him in charge of the whole parish and its duties. He bounced up out of that bed going full time!

Now he didn’t do it in five minutes. He was much better right away and it took a couple of days to get back to normal. I don’t know what he had, but he may have had something that matched up to the medicine we gave him. I don’t know whether we got him well from a significant infection because of our high doses of strong antibiotics or if that was something the Lord let us go through in order to work things in us Texans, in me only, between me and the priests and, as always, the created ripple effect. There’s no telling the dynamics of what worked in the depths of our souls. In me, it was the depth of my soul in regards to that nurse and has spilled over into others. But God got a lot out of that, and I have no idea if it was because my patient had a severe infection and we got him over it with potent medicines.

I can’t say my relationships with the priests were improved by that event because my relationships were tremendous already.

The priests had a rickety pickup truck which they used to drive about town. They would drive over to the clinic in it because, I think, I had told them,

“You are the people’s pastors here. You are our pastors when we are here. We need you to oversee us and say whatever needs to be said to us.” So they came over to the clinic almost daily, making an appearance. That made an impression with the people, including us. They all knew we were not Catholics but Protestants and that it didn’t matter.

It was a dramatic change in that village, the priests coming over and shepherding us, and us participating in their church services. Padre Miguel, who had been the bedside nurse, lived with his head in heaven and his feet on the earth. It is simply the way he was. He would come over in that pickup truck, park it in front of the clinic, and come in for a visit with patients and personnel.

There was one tree in front of the clinic. That tree was about six or eight inches wide at the shoulder. It wasn’t a big tree but big enough. Padre Miguel would park in the same place every visit, next to that tree. His door would bump against the tree, opening just enough for him to squeeze out. He would wiggle out of the cab, working his way away from the truck. The next visit, he would park it in exactly the same spot. He appeared to never remember that. He was a lover of people and had his focus on the Lord. The kids loved him, not only because he played soccer with them. He was a simple person. The kingdom of God was uncomplicated to him.

We weren’t there, but several summers later he was playing soccer on a team with the kids. They had gone to another village to play and were all hot and probably super heated. Coming back, they dove in the river and Padre Miguel never came back up. God took him. I would say he was both the perfect priest and the perfect nurse.

Every day, all day long, was an experience at the clinic in La Concordia. Gustavo began to talk to us about going out into the villages. They had asked us to come and sometimes had sent mounts for us to ride so we wouldn’t have to walk -- one horse, one donkey and one mule or any combination of the three.

On Bob West’s and my first visit, Gustavo had wanted to show us a particular village. No one was expecting us. We left riding horseback around noon, following the valley trail. By the time we got up on a hill overlooking the village it was getting along towards evening. We looked but thought we needed to go back instead of going in for a short visit. It would soon be dark, which would be “mountain dark.” It had been a bouncy ride on that horse. As a boy on the farm I had been accustomed to riding a tractor, not horses. Those Mexican saddles were wooden and covered with one layer of leather. My rear end was the padding. I said, “Gustavo, is there a shorter way back?”

“We can go through the mountains. It is shorter, but it will get dark and we don’t have a light.”

What I said next was as much out of desperation as in faith, I said,

“Gustavo, God will give us light,” and we headed up into the mountains.

It got dark early because the clouds closed in. It started raining heavily. There were the three of us -- Gustavo, Bob West and me in that order, with Gustavo leading. It got so dark that we couldn’t see each other. We talked and sang so that we would know how close to stay. We depended on our mounts to follow in line. A couple of times the horses stopped and would not move forward. Gustavo got off and felt around on the ground in the dark, both times finding us at a cliff. The horses knew there was a drop-off there, so had stopped. Gustavo would get us back on the trail.

Then the lightning started. Thereafter we had no shortage of light because for 3 hours we were in an electrical storm. We got back into town by God’s light.

One time, the five of us clinic personnel were on mounts that had been brought from a village. We stayed there a couple of days. The three ladies, Gustavo and I went. I don’t know if the subject of this story was officially the leader of the village, but he was a tall guy who had real bearing, a real principled type of person. We stayed at his house, and when you stayed at someone’s house, they moved out of their bed. You took it and stayed in their bed, no arguing. Bed bugs and all. They weren’t “beds” but were wooden frames with a lacework of leather. You laid on those leather strips covered with whatever was necessary according to the temperature.

In that village, I made my first public speech to all of the men who gathered. I knew they understood me because they laughed when I said something I also thought was funny. I turned to Gustavo occasionally for help because he had practiced hearing and speaking English with me. He would give me a few words during my speech and I used them.

The man of the house, that principle person, showed me his hernia. When he stood up, the hernia fell freely through the opening in his abdominal wall, stopped only by his skin. It was about the size of a football. When he lay down, it fell back into place. The hernia didn’t appear to be bothering him at all. He came to me to have it fixed.

I thought I’ll make short work of his request. I began by telling him the first reason why I could not operate on him.

“I have no anesthetic, nothing to put you to sleep.”

I thought that would do it. He was insulted and said, in Spanish of course,

“I lay down and you cut!”

So God called my bluff on that. Not having an anesthetic wasn’t good enough reason for him. I told him it was too much of a surgery, too big. He needed to go to the city to get a good surgeon in a hospital for that. I was relieved that he accepted that excuse.

Those people were good patients. Some had never seen a doctor before. They came in with active pulmonary tuberculosis. I knew they were coughing germs, coughing TB, but we came prepared for treating them. We had injectable streptomycin shots every day, plus the pills for long term treatment. Before we left, some of those patients, who had been slowly dying were now strong and recovering. I have no idea how much better they got, or if they died six months later, but we gave them a chance. On God’s schedule, when we stopped going with our clinic, and the local Mexican doctor who had continued our work had left for the city, the federal government came to the village with a public health clinic.

We had all kinds of worms, all types. Some of the kids were coughing worms from their intestines, up into their stomach, up their esophagus and out their throat. You have to be careful that you don’t kill all the worms at one time when people have such a load because the dead worms will form a mass, causing an intestinal obstruction and the patient will die. So you have to titer your medicine a bit, kill a few worms, then later a few more. You like to do that in a better situation than out in the boonies, in case surgery is needed for an obstruction. Intestinal worms were the most common illness we treated.

Our patients were very appreciative, although one man was upset about his wife’s reaction to treatment for her worms. She had an ill-response from the medicine but did well soon thereafter. In those locations they don’t sue the doctor.

So many people had to walk a couple of days with gunshot or machete wounds from fighting. If we hadn’t been there, they wouldn’t have survived, although people can be tough.

One patient came in on a litter. It had been a couple of days since he had been shot in the abdomen. He needed surgery, hospitalization and antibiotics. Lots of stuff. His ambulance was an ox cart. So we used Gustavo’s truck and placed him on one of our clinic mattresses. Gustavo drove him the 75 miles to Tuxtla where we got him into a hospital. We bought his medicine for him because patients had to buy their own medicines at a pharmacy and take them with them to the hospital. We got it all arranged and left. About a month or two later, he and his family came by and really thanked us for saving his life. Of course, medically, we hadn’t done anything. Otherwise, we had been family.

Carolyn, our nurse was so excited that she was having the opportunity to practice this unusual, special medicine. However, she hadn’t had anything really exciting happen until, finally, one day the friendly local doctor across the street asked her if she could help him with a surgery. A man had been badly cut up with a machete. She had the opportunity to help sew the wounds. That was the medical highlight of her summer. She got in on some real trauma.

I think the most unique patient was a woman brought in by her family. Her eyes were all red, the eyelids swollen and her eyeballs were infected. Her eyes were infected because her eyelids had turned inward and her eyelashes were scratching her eyeballs. They had been like that for years. That is a fairly common ailment in older people. Here in the states, the doctors do a little surgery, releasing the eyelids to roll back out like they are supposed to be, and the eyes are okay. Down there, her eyes were scratchy and all infected.

The wife of our other doctor got some tweezers from Nancy or perhaps they were her own, she plucked those eyelashes out, and taught the family about the cause and treatment of the problem. She gave them the instrument and some eye medicine with instructions to keep the eyelashes plucked. That was her biggest adventure of the summer!

Living in a third world country, if you are there to give of yourself, is very rewarding. After taking the clinic down the first time, before we left, the friendly Mexican doctor, Dr. Juan, even began going to church. We got brotherly close with all of us. He was married and had children. He was a good guy who benefited from Christian fellowship. It was probably helpful that our fellowship was on his socio-economic-professional level. He warmed to us and relaxed. When we weren’t there, we gave our supplies and equipment to him. We trained two local girls, one to be his lab tech and one to be his nurse. They went to work for him, so he had a much better equipped clinic than previously. And he had the staff. God formed another community. The Holy Spirit always brings people together whether it is two or a village. When He is allowed freedom, He will make the several one.

As stated, the National Health Service came in and established a clinic with a doctor in La Concordia. Therefore, our clinic for the poor wasn’t necessary. And neither was Dr. Juan. He went to work for the state in an office job in Tuxtla. The other Mexican doctor in La Concordia, who never had become our friend, complained about me to the state medical offices in Tuxtla. I didn’t know this until we got a letter saying,

“It has been reported that you are practicing medicine without a license. Would you please come at your earliest convenience to these offices?”

I showed the letter to Dr. Juan and he said,

“Oh, I know what that is. He, the other doctor, has turned you in. You write them a letter saying, ‘Thank you for your letter that we have received,’ and tell them that you will indeed be there at your earliest convenience. Then you forget it. I’ll be going to see them.” The state didn’t really want to do that, but they had to because this other doctor had complained.

“You write the letter and I’ll take care of it,” said Dr. Juan.

Even after the state put in the clinic and staffed it, in his state position Dr. Juan kept working on our behalf. He got a letter, signed by the chief doctor in the state saying that I, or any doctor with me, could practice medicine in Chiapas anytime. I didn’t even ask for that. God gave me friends in high places. Dr. Juan became a doctor in high places.

(Nancy) The first summer we were down there [Bob, me and the two ladies] my job was to shop, cook, do laundry, and get to know people. As a result, my Spanish improved very much. I had taken Spanish in high school and college so I had the basics and some vocabulary. It was poor but that didn’t matter. It made me look “not so smarty” to the locals. On one occasion I accidentally said the wrong number when someone asked the ages of my children, I told them my oldest son was 50 instead of 15. All that brought was laughter and better fellowship.

I went around town shopping. The way you know where to go to shop is you go to one house for eggs and to another house for meat. You don’t buy milk. I learned that when you buy meat, you go to the square and look around it for a long cane pole with a flag. Pink flags meant pork, which you never wanted. You looked for a red flag because it meant beef. Then you walked to the red flag and looked further. Another red flag could be seen, so you would follow the red flags until you found the house that had killed beef the day before or early that same day. If I had not taken my meat container for receiving the beef, they very nicely gave me some papers to put it in. After that happened once, I knew to take my container.

The beef was very tough and had been butchered out in the back yard where all the flies were. It had been chopped up on the tree stump. You remembered to cook it very well done, and to tenderiz it. We didn’t eat a lot of beef. You bought chicken the same way.

Once I was given a whole, live chicken. When patients didn’t have any money, they were still generous and would bring fruit -- marvelous, fresh fruit off the trees. But one day someone brought a live chicken. I had lessons from my mother about what to do but I didn’t want to deal with this live chicken. I “chickened out” and carried it across the street to the doctor’s house where he had two maids who knew what to do with it. I asked if they would take care of the chicken for me. They brought it back to me ready to cook.

Visiting went on between the patients, too. This one lady just kept coming day after day. She wasn’t sick, but she wanted to visit. She would bring a new fruit from her trees to validate the reason why she was coming.

People were very friendly. They asked about my family. That was a good thing to talk about, you know, and when they found out I had five children they couldn’t believe it.

“But you’re chica [trim]! You’re not gorda [fat].” They expected a woman to get fatter with every baby, which they usually did there. Bob suggested that I start an exercise class. Up on our veranda, hidden away where nobody could see them bounce and roll, we had our class. Some of those ladies were pretty big Mamas.

Not the first summer but the next summer, Ben, our fifth son, was in diapers. That is a whole story to itself in Mexico. Our other two younger boys went, also. Dan and Jay were 5 and 10 years old, somewhere about those ages. They had a ball. That summer we were in town, not on the rancho. The little boys in town would chase the wild pigs. People let their pigs run loose and no one would bother anyone else’s pigs. You had pigs and kids in the street with little kids playing the pig-chasing game. Pigs went home just like chickens went home. Jay said that was the greatest fun, getting to chase pigs and wrestle them to the ground.

The first summer we went to La Concordia, people in the Church of the Redeemer cared for our kids. One of the ladies of the church, mother of a one year old, had moved into our house with us. There were other adults, also. Our two older sons, teenagers, didn’t go with us. They lived with someone else of the church while we were gone for the summer and returned home when we got back. In the church, we were family.

On a later trip we went to the other end of that large lake that had already filled up. We stayed way back in the hills at Gustavo’s rancho, away from everywhere, except nearer to the people who had no medical care. Jay worked in the lab doing the things he had been taught back at the Houston clinic lab, jobs they needed done as they saw patients who had come from far and wide. Dan was compadre with Daniel, Gustavo’s oldest son, rounding up cattle, chasing chickens or whatever country boys tend to do. The doctor and his wife who went with us had a son Ben’s age. Those two kids played and just had a grand experience all summer. It was a very different life.

Dan and Jay also went on a very brave hike up a mountain, getting lost coming back down. They found their way back before dark, having had an adventure they still remember.

There were just two trips on which we stayed for a couple of months. Other trips were shorter. One summer was one month and some of Bob’s were one to three week trips.

I recall some of the driving occasions down there. The Lord got pickup loads, carloads of stuff through the Mexican customs. Other people gave us stuff that they couldn’t get past customs, and we got through with it. We were never going to pay bribes to get through. Our commitment was to righteousness. If the Lord didn’t get it past customs, He didn’t want it in Mexico. Even a certain Catholic ministry couldn’t get their stuff through. They gave it to us and the Lord got it through.

The typical scenario was that we would pull our vehicle into a customs stall and a uniformed official would come out and inspect “everything.” Everything they opened and inspected was just personal effects and clothes. They never opened the lab or medicine stuff and we would go right through, check point after check point. One summer when Mark, a Texas doctor, and I were flying down, we got on the airplane in Dallas. We asked the Lord for somebody to sit by. We sat by an attorney from Atlanta, Georgia, who was a young, single man going to Mexico for a little vacation time. We struck up a conversation with him and said,

“You’re going to have a good time in Mexico City.”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, yeah. There’s things to do there!”

“Yeah.”

No matter how we encouraged him about his trip, we perceived that no matter what, he wasn’t going to have a good time.

We started telling him about the Lord and how He had always gotten our things through customs. For example, when flying to Mexico City we had a suitcase full of quart jars filled with many thousands of pills. Customs agents opened the suitcase and said,

“What’s this?”

We said, “Medicine for the poor people in Chiapas.”

“Pass.”

On another trip our suitcase was loaded with medicines and medical equipment, and it disappeared. When we went to pick up our bags it was gone but there was a similar suitcase that wasn’t ours. We knew that someone had picked up the wrong suitcase. The airlines said whoever took it would soon discover their mistake, call the airline, and the airline would deliver the correct bags to the correct owners.

The other bag belonged to an American Consulate employee who had picked up the wrong luggage and passed through customs without being inspected, because they never inspect consulate employees baggage. So we were telling these kinds of stories to this attorney. We told him,

“We have suitcases on this plane right now with all kinds of medicines in them and God is going to get them through.”

“OK,” He said and he started to perk up.

We went together through immigration and got our suitcases off the rack as it came off the plane. We got in this long line of people to get up to the customs agent who was opening everyone’s luggage. We were probably eight or ten people back and it was going to be a long while yet. Then, on the other side of the customs officer, I noticed a man in official airport uniform. He looked right at me, pointed at me, wiggled his finger and said something. I nodded my head affirmative. He waved me toward him. We picked up our suitcases, walked right past everyone, and he put us in a taxi. We were gone. I have no idea what that was all about, but I engaged with that man the way he was engaging with me.

As we went past the customs agent, our now-happy attorney from Atlanta said, “He did it! He did it!”

KATE: AT THIS POINT I REALIZED THAT MUCH OF THIS IS A DUPLICATION OF PREVIOUS MATERIAL. I WILL FINISH IT ANYWAY. I CAN GUARANTEE YOU THAT NO TWO COPIES ARE EXACTLY THE SAME.

One time I had a fairly new banjo that I was taking for the summer, hoping to have some practice. I got up to the customs counter and the agent said,

“What’s this?”

“That’s my banjo.”

When you play the banjo for awhile, you get a few calluses on your fingers. He said, “Oh, you’re bringing this in to sell.”

“No, that’s my banjo. I play. See?”

I held my hand up, fingers pointing toward his face. He didn’t even look at them. I think he didn’t understand me exactly. I think he thought I wanted to argue with him. He closed the case and passed me.

That reminds me what the Lord had told us the first time going in when He told me that we would encounter some missionaries in an airport and there would be a financial problem. Coming out on our first trip, Bob West and I had spent our last cent. But we had paid for our return ticket back in Texas. Now we were leaving with only our tickets, and empty pockets. When I got to the counter in Tuxtla, I told the man behind the airline desk who we were and he said,

“That’ll be $4.00 each.”

“But we paid everything before we left Houston.”

“This is the airport fee. $4.00 each. You can’t get on the plane unless you pay the fee.”

I didn’t have anything. Not even a penny.

I had just met this missionary couple as I was walking up to the counter. They were American missionaries to the area, saying goodbye to somebody. I had stopped to shake hands with them and introduce ourselves just before we stepped to the counter. Then I stepped to the counter and encountered our financial problem.

As a simple and faithful statement of fact, I said to the airline agent, “I’m going to get on that plane.” I knew we were going to get on the airplane so I simply said so to the agent. He said,

“Don’t get on; I’ll have to pay it if you get on.”

I said, “Oh, I didn’t mean that.”

All of a sudden, the Lord reminded me, “airport, missionary, financial need.” I didn’t realize it was going to be my financial problem! I thought it was going to be a missionary’s financial problem, so I stepped back to the missionary and said,

“We need $8 for our airport fee. Would you happen to have $8?”

“Sure.”

We got his information and sent it back to him. The Lord just did little things like that.

Part 9

(This is more of the Mexico Story, Church of the Redeemer and my traveling ministry.)

During those years, I did a lot of traveling during weekday evenings and on weekends holding retreats. These were retreats, or weekends of renewal, as we called them. I was able to travel that much, even though I was working very full-time as a doctor and administrator of our clinic, because I had [and still have] an exceptional wife, lots of support in every area of my involvements and life, capable chief stewards of our large household [15-21 souls of us, and a brother named Doug. He had a nice, fast single engine plane; then a two-engine plane as we traveled more. In the evenings we would fly to Texas areas and on weekends from California to New England. Even though he had heard my testimonies and teachings over and over, he was delighted to sit and listen again as a part of the congregation.

I learned to fly during those trips, including take-offs and landings. He gave me formal instructions but I never did take my tests or fly solo. I enjoyed flying. One night we were coming back from Louisiana, flying along the Texas coast toward Houston. Nancy and some of the family were to meet us at Hobby Airport south of Houston. Hobby was closer to where we lived. Bush Intercontinental Airport was north of Houston, considerably further from home. As we got closer to Houston, the tower at Hobby reported that they were getting fogged in. Doug and I talked it over. We decided to try to land at Hobby. (This is why preachers and doctors crash more as pilots of private planes than anyone else. Preachers trust God and doctors *think* they are God! So they make unwise decisions that are based on confidence in what God can do, and crash!) This was a set up for one of those times, and Doug and I decided we would give it a try.

As we approached the airport, Doug and the Air Traffic Controller at Hobby would talk. He would instruct Doug as to left or right, up or down. As we approached the runway, we watched for the strobe lights which would lead us in. Finding the strobe lights was absolutely necessary if we were going to land in the fog. We need to see those lights.

I was in the co-pilot’s seat leaning my head against the window looking down on my side. Doug was flying the plane and looking down out the left window. We were on descent and getting close. We knew we were low and should be able to see the lights by now or very soon.

I saw a light and I said, *“I saw a light!”* Doug gunned the plane and headed for north Houston and Bush Intercontinental Airport.

On the way there, I said, *“Doug, why did you break off the landing?”*

“Because you said we were going to crash.”

*“I didn’t say we were going to crash. I said I saw a light.”*

You said, “We’re going to crash,” and I took off.

We got to north Houston at Bush Airport just before it fogged in, also. God did things like that.

We were flying in from west Texas coming towards Houston. Before we took off, Doug talked to the local air traffic control and checked the weather. There were thunder storms in our path and we were going to fly around them. No plane or pilot likes to fly through thunderheads. No matter how good of a pilot you are, thunderheads can “eat” light planes. Down drafts will drive you down into the ground. They will turn you upside down and crash you. Doug told the air traffic controller at the airport,

*“You have radar. We’ll take off and head for that gap between those thunderheads. You tell us on the radio if we should turn more.”*

Soon we were approaching those thunderheads. Doug asked for the latest radar instructions. The controller said,

*“Go straight ahead.”*

We did, and soon that airplane started turning all kinds of ways. Doug asked,

*“How long do we have to go through this?*

The controller said, *“You’re almost through it.”*

We got through it pretty soon. I thought If that was going *around* a thunderhead, it sure would’ve been something had we gone *through* it!” Clear air is unstable around thunderheads where radar sees only clear air.

But we enjoyed lots of experiences together. I landed here at Corpus Christi airport. As a student, that was the toughest landing I made. We had a side wind that was Corpus Christi strong.

So Doug and I became close brothers. On occasion during daylight he would set the automatic pilot and take a snooze while I watched things. I felt the responsibility, although anyone could have done the same. But Doug was and still is my brother.

Our travels, in regards to Mexico, were either by commercial airline or automobile. Several times we drove. I don’t know how things are now, but the Pan Am Highway was a two-lane, asphalt road like our farm to market roads here in Texas. It was nice and well-kept but was a bit wavy and bumpy in places, especially on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec crossing from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific. For many distances there were no shoulders on the road. The highway crossed long plains and wound through the mountains, often making sharp 90-degree turns. There was lots of traffic, including trucks and busses. If you got behind a truck going up a long climb, you would have to slow down and settle in for a slow trip for a while.

Once there were nine of us traveling in an International Travel All. We were going for the summer so we had all of our baggage aboard. A delightful and faithful young man was driving. It was night We knew to be very careful when driving at night. I was asleep in the front seat. Everyone else was asleep, too. I woke up and saw that we were close to a sharp right hand turn and the driver had not seen it. Coming down the mountainside, on the other leg of that right turn was a stream of vehicles. I said,

*“Sharp turn!”* and he slowed to make the turn. He may have had road hypnosis. We could have had a fiery crash with a whole bunch of vehicles, but the Lord interceded. We used wisdom and faith. Perhaps sometimes we trusted Him beyond true faith, I would say. Traveling at night in Mexico was usually foolishness.

Another time we were driving through the mountains during the rainy season. The rain had washed down the side of a mountain, hit the highway that was carved into the mountainside, and washed away almost the entire highway. Below the highway was a drop of several hundred feet, straight down. But the road had not entirely washed out. I a car hugged the mountain wall it could get by. However, underneath that remaining part of the road there was very little but air. Cars were lined up on both sides of the washout. I studied the washout and our situation. I knew it was a couple of hundred miles to go back and take the next shortest way around the washout. We talked it over, prayed, all stayed in the Travel All, and went across the little bridge. I don’t know what any others of those vehicles did, but we went across. It was just wide enough for one car and there was little support underneath, but the Lord held it up.

One night we were driving in the La Concordia area on that long, 75-mile dirt road between the state capital and La Concordia, headed for La Concordia. We came to a washed out bridge over an arroyo. It was just an arroyo that ordinarily would be dry, but this was the rainy season. It had water in it and the water was running at a pretty good speed! There was a place where vehicles could get off of the road and drive through the arroyo but not when water was flowing. The water was running and this was at night.

We decided that we needed to get to La Concordia. I knew if we stalled in the arroyo that we would really be in trouble. I drove down the bank and hit the water. Everything went black. I thought “Uh-oh, the electrical system is dead,” but the lights were only under water. That was the only problem. Everything had *not* gone dead. Almost immediately we zipped up the other side of the arroyo. That Travel All didn’t sputter a bit!

Another time, headed home we left La Concordia and were almost onto that Pan Am Highway near the state capital, Tuxtla. We were in a 5-year old Buick 9-passenger station wagon, with nine passengers, two-wheel drive, and highway tires. All of our baggage was tied on top. We looked like Ma and Pa Kettle headed for California!

We came to a place of the road where cars and trucks were stopped in long lines in both directions. The road had become a block-long mud hole and was as far to the right and left as any vehicle was able to drive. The mud had been churned and re-churned from all the trucks and cars that had been going through, until no others would chance the passage. The mud and ruts were a couple of feet deep and filled up my visual field.

We looked at the situation for a few minutes. There was a long drive ahead of us to Houston, and this road was not going to be improved anytime soon. The “reasonable” thing was to drive through it. I told everyone,

*“Get in. We’re going through. Pray.*”

Remember now, this was one block long, not just some little mud hole. I knew that if we stopped, we were sunk! We had to keep moving. We got in that mud and bounced and jumped, jumped and bounced. We kept going, never stopping, and came out on the other side. Off we zoomed! I don’t know if the mob of drivers believed what they say, or whether they cheered our safe passage, because we were off and running.

The resonator, not the muffler, was loosened so we took it off. We didn’t need a resonator for then but we put one on later.

We had some escapades while traveling! I don’t know how much of each I would label as genuine and pure faith. Some of it may have been foolishness. Maybe it was never all of either. I’m content that the Lord knows and has it all written down in His books. He carried us through.

On another trip we brought a Mexican couple and their 2 or 3 year old child out with us. He was Gustavo’s brother. I was ignorant of all the absolutely necessary red tape ordinarily needed for them to enter the United States legally. All these three had was their birth certificates and personal identification.

We headed for the border. We thought that first we would identify ourselves and show our own papers. Then we would identify the three Mexicans and say,*“these people are coming up to Houston to learn to live close to the Lord.”* That was the absolute truth and the *only* truth. We thought they would send us on through the U. S. border with something like,

*“Of course, pass through!”*

We were so accustomed to all of the ways the Lord had been getting car and truck loads of our personal and clinic things into Mexico that we supposed it worked the other direction, also. Every time we went into Mexico, even with barrels of equipment, everything was passed, even after inspections. Whatever they inspected was always our personal stuff and not equipment or medicines for the clinic. I didn’t have any idea that we couldn’t get Mexicans through in the other direction.

When we got to the Laredo, Texas border I was night, around 8 o’clock or so. We presented ourselves and the immigration officer said,

*“These people can’t go through!”*

“Oh, why not?”

*“They don’t have the papers. They have to go to Mexico City, get papers and come back.”*

“Oh my.”

We were next to being flat broke. We never had much money, but when we came out of Mexico we had either used all of our money or had given it away. He said,

*“Right; they can’t go in. You don’t have the necessary papers. That’s against the law. Immigration doesn’t allow it. You just can’t do it.”*

We had no means of sending them back on the bus. We didn’t want to do that, anyway. So I talked politely with him for 20 or 30 minutes, with him doing paper work at his desk most of the time. I definitely avoided being argumentative, even persuasive. He did not terminate our conversation but would not budge from his decision.

Finally I respectfully asked,

“Do you mind if I talk to your supervisor?”

*“It won’t do you any good, but yes. Mr. Rogers will be here at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow.”*

We pooled our money and rented a room for the night in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

The next morning I was in Mr. Rogers’ office before breakfast, there being no “after breakfast” that day. Mr. Rogers was official-type friendly. I explained our situation and he said the same things the other officer had said. I knew two things. One was that I needed to love and honor this man. Two was that I needed to persist on the positive side of coming through with our Mexican friends. So I asked him how it could be done and what were the possibilities? He said,

*“Even the President can’t tell us to let you in. There’s no one who can overrule an immigration officer who is doing his job.”*

“I certainly would not want to do that,” I said.

I began telling him about the work we were doing in La Concordia, and how the Lord had directed us, given us fellowship with the people and the church, and how we had established an ongoing clinic. I told him that these 3 people were coming to Houston to learn to live closer to the Lord and if he would let us through we would have them back to Mexico at whatever time he said.

*“Oh, I’ve heard that a lot. They come in and they stay in. You are bringing them in to work for you.”*

“That’s a long way from the kind of thing we would do, Mr. Rogers.”

We talked and we talking. He never did end the conversation or walk out of the room. He never did say, “That’s it, we’re through.” We just kept talking and pretty soon, he said,

*“You sound just like my wife!”*

God had paved the way! Then he said,

*“I’m going to let you through, but if they don’t come back in six months, I’m never going to let anybody else through again. If I can’t believe you, I can’t believe anyone.”*

Mr. Rogers passed us because I honored him from my heart and continued to gently explain to him the truth of what was going on. [What was going on was that in heaven there is free passage of persons from one place to another, so the Lord established that freedom on earth – Matthew 6:10.]

At six months the three were scheduled to go back to Mexico, but our desire was that they stay for a full year. We were scheduled to go back to La Concordia the next summer but not in six months. However, we were prepared to take them across the border and put them on a bus. I thought,

“I’ll call Mr. Rogers and ask him for an extention.”

I got him on the phone and identified myself.

“They are ready to go. The six months is going to be up in a couple of days. We are ready to bring them back, just the way you said we should. But I wanted to ask you if we could have another six months because we are going back in the summer.”

*“Sure. No one has ever asked me for that before. Go to an immigration office and get their visa extended.”*

We kept them here for the year, with Mr. Rogers’ permission! I trust that our relationship with him became a larger picture of his dear wife’s relationship to him.

It seemed that much of what the Lord did that we labeled *“important”* He would make “impossible.” Time and again, things were “impossible.”

Some Catholic nuns in Houston had a medical ministry in Mexico. At one time they couldn’t get their material and equipment across the border. We were in communication and fellowship so, when they heard we were doing the same, they gave us their cargo. We took it across and used it in our clinic.

We were absolutely committed to not paying bribes. We couldn’t see Jesus paying a bribe. We were tempted by friends who told us,

*“Don’t consider it a bribe. Those Mexicans don’t make much money. It is actually considered part of their making a living in Mexico.”*

But we didn’t go for that either. We were giving them life and medicine and so forth, and we wouldn’t mind giving some money, but not in the form of a bribe.

In the Church of the Redeemer our services would be about two or three hours long. Then afterwards people, including visitors, would stay for more hours. Besides just generally visiting, the elders would remain at the front of the church for prayer and counsel. People would come to the front and kneel at the altar rail. There would be a half-dozen or so of the elders there to pray for and talk to them about whatever they wanted prayed about.

The Lord spoke things into people’s lives and changed their souls and life-circumstances. By the spiritual gifts knowledge He would speak and people would be changed. They would leave the church with that change made in their lives.

This story is easy to remember because it was very dramatic. There was a young lady who had been visiting with some other young ladies of the church for a few weeks. She was probably around 20 years old. They had been talking about the Lord healing bodies and souls. She was paralyzed in her legs and walked with crutches on her arms and with full metal braces on her legs. She came to the altar for prayer one night during the church service, not at the end of the service. Her parents were with her, and had been trying to dissuade her from getting into the kind of religious fanaticism sometimes associated with miracles. They were Christians but not believers in miracles.

They came that night and sat in the back pews. I was also at the back. The girl got up and went down to the front, laboriously, on her crutches and in her full-leg metal splints. She was prayed for at the altar by a couple of the elders. Then she unbuckled her splints and laid down those crutches. She walked a bit unsteadily but walked right back up that aisle! People were really praising the Lord for His faithfulness to His word and nature.

As she began to make her way back up the aisle, her mom and dad got up and ran towards her. But they weren’t running towards her; they were running towards the altar rail. They fell on their knees at the altar rail confessing their sinful unbelief. That was a mighty time!

There were other personal and mighty times. Twice, I heard the angels singing. There’s nothing so beautiful as the angels singing. I’m not talking about “people angels” singing. On both occasions it was during and after a lengthy time of congregational singing and praise which led into everyone singing in tongues which would go on for several minutes. Congregational singing in the spirit was and is a very beautiful, harmonic sound to God and man. People easily harmonize in the spirit and praise the Lord. Then, as the singing gradually faded out, there were be a time when perhaps someone would prophesy, someone may have a message in tongues, someone else would interpret the message in tongues.

Those events of opened minds and hearts focusing on Him would bring folks very close to the Lord. But this particular time, as the singing faded out and the quiet time began, there was another singing that took over. It was *up there* *somewhere,* not human voices, not the congregation, and it was not coming from the balcony. It was the angels singing and praising God with us and beyond us. They may have been doing that while we were singing but I don’t know. That happened twice in my hearing.

When that happened, I didn’t say anything to anyone. It was like it was too much to talk about. A few weeks later, to one of the other elders, I said,

“Ladd, a couple of weeks ago, did you hear the angels sing?”

*“Yes, I did!”*

He hadn’t said anything either to anyone. It was like it was too precious to talk about. Then I learned that others had heard the same and had the same impression of who was singing.

One day, during my traveling years, I was in the Houston clinic working and seeing patients. I took a phone call from a doctor named in Sulphur Springs, Texas. I did not know him. He said he was about to give his life to the Lord in a deeper way than he ever had. His was going to be a deep and permanent commitment, so first he wanted to know if God still did things like He did in the Bible, like in the book of Acts. He said, “That’s the depth to which I’m getting ready to give myself to the Lord, but if He doesn’t still do things like that, I’m not going to take that step.” I took some time to testify to him over the phone. Then he said,

*“That’s all I want to know.”*

And he gave himself to the Lord. He and others began coming down from Sulphur Springs, Texas to the Church of the Redeemer in Houston for visits on weekends. Soon they asked if somebody from the church could be sent to Sulphur Springs to do some teaching. I was the one who was sent. Of course, Doug flew us up there and back home the same night.

Those Sulphur Springs saints really were open, honest, faithful and loving toward one other. They weren’t immature or shallow. They were solid believers. They had been drawn together in an interdenominational Protestant and Catholic group that had studied the Bible in depth together and read good books written by various Christian writers. They had prayed together and had been doing that for years. That’s whom the Lord inserted me into, to go teach those well-prepared saints.

I began to do that. They were babes towards the Lord. One of them was a young adult who chewed tobacco. As the Lord began to work on him and on various aspects of his life, he began to come under conviction about his chewing tobacco. He went to one of the other young men, who was the song leader and a leader in that group. He asked him about what he should do about this tobacco, that it seemed the Lord was dealing with him about it. The leader said,

*“Well, just give it to the Lord.”*

In his openness towards the Lord, the young man replied,

*“What’s He going to do with it?”*

It was an honest question. “What’s He going to do with it?” Indeed, he did soon give the habit to the Lord. People go far with the Lord and others when they relate to that depth. Honestly, simply and openly.

In Mexico the people heard us talking about what was in the Bible. When they asked us why we did or said what we did, we would tell them that is was in the Bible. So, they asked the priests to begin teaching them the Bible. Local, pastoral Bible studies were begun, by example.

The first summer while we were there, after being there for about four weeks or so, the church bells began ringing. They rang on and on. We were accustomed to their ringing three times daily for services, but not this continual way. I asked Gustavo why the ringing. He said that some had died and that the bells rang when there was a death. I asked him why this was the first time I had heard the ringing. He said that this was the first person who had died since we had come to the village. That was an unusual thing. I knew that I had not been treating people who were so ill that they might have died – not many, anyway. I learned that everyone was aware that no one had died since we got there, and that it was considered a spiritual matter, not medical. That was of the Lord. He was working faith and love into the village, and was including us in His work. We never experienced being Protestants among them or how they had related to previous Protestants. From the very beginning, the priests and the people openly befriended us. They trusted us, observed us, searched out our lives, and listened to what we said. We didn’t say anything about the Bible or Christian life in a “teachy” way. It was spontaneous in conversation.

They then turned to their leaders. We told the priests that we would not do anything to undermine them, that even though we were Protestants, those priests were God’s pastors in that village. We would fit in just like the people.

During that time, back up in Houston, Texas our church was asked to send someone to go live in Sulphur Springs to form the body of Christ. They said they’d had all the teaching and praying together that was needed to be helpful but they needed someone from our community life to come live with them.

At that point, Nancy and I had only three of our five sons still living at home. The oldest son was in the Navy, and the next was in college. So, Nancy and I, our 3 boys, and Keno were sent to Sulphur Springs. Keno was a Church of the Redeemer neighborhood boy, a gang member whom the Lord had snatched out of the pit. He had become a volunteer janitor at the church and was living with us at the time. The rest of our household didn’t go with us.

We didn’t know beforehand but we soon learned that Keno was the only Hispanic living openly in the Sulphur Springs area. I don’t think the area still has this next distinction, but Hopkins County, Sulphur Springs being its county seat, produced more dairy milk than any other county in America. There were lots of dairies and lots of undocumented workers who didn’t come to town. They knew they would be picked up and deported, but there was our Keno. He would say he was “the only Mexican in town!” He was from Houston and had been living among Mexicans, many of whom were undocumented.

This interdenominational group had invited us but we felt we needed to be invited by a church. The pastor of a particular church was in the interdenominational Bible study group. He was the only clergyman in it. Also in that church and this group was this a doctor, the one who had called me concerning his making a more grand commitment to the Lord. Nancy and I decided we would join that church. We went to that church for a visit, for which they gathered their leadership. There were probably 18-20 in leadership. We spent an hour and a half talking about our coming. Some of them were a little skittish about it because we were “charismatics,” which meant various things to them. They were responsible business and professional people and church leaders. At one point they asked,

*“What will you do when you come?”*

“I’ll just be a member of the church and do whatever is at hand to do.”

*“Just what do you think you might do while you’re here?”*

“I don’t know. I teach Bible so I might do some Bible teaching. But God *will* change this church. I won’t change it, the Lord will change it. He will change people and He will fill the church up.” The church was very small and pretty thin on numbers. It was a good size building but there were maybe 40 people in Sunday service. One of the things they asked me was if I was coming for a salary. I said,

“No, I’m not coming for a salary.”

After they asked about three times what I would do, they got the picture that we would just come and be there. We were expecting nothing from them but that we were coming to give of ourselves and God would do something. Whatever He would do, *He would do.* So they invited us to come on that basis.

We came and we joined that church. I would just hang out around the church for a few hours every day. I got to know the small staff and met a few people who came and went during the days.

There was a widow lady, moderately well to do and a member of that church, who lived in town. Before we got there she had left town for an extended visit with her family on the east coast. Her house was fully furnished and equipped. She offered her house for us to live in and we were very grateful to her and the Lord for that. We moved into it and lived there. She provided for us.

There was a surgeon in town who invited me to assist him with his surgeries. After six months or so, I heard of a four year college in a nearby town that was looking for a doctor to staff their student clinic. I went to work there every day in the mornings. I was careful to not open a medical practice, which would have required more time and place responsibility to patients. That seemed to not have fit in with God’s plans for us at that time.

We settled in. People began to move into town to be a part of what the Lord was doing in that church. Some were responsible, church leadership-type people. Soon, we were meeting at the church for Bible study and other activities seven days a week. The church governing board, which had previously met once a year, now met every Sunday morning for leadership, decision-making reasons. The church was filled up.

Some of the people were like you would expect when the Lord is building His church. He was bringing them out of prostitution and various kinds of mental and physical disabilities. The physical disabilities were such that other people wouldn’t have much or anything to do with them, but the Lord moved on them and they began to be among the more faithful of the church. Those with physical, social, and personal problems were coming clean in their souls and habits. It was wonderful.

But after 3 years the traditionalists who had been the leaders of the church wanted their church back. They had a Saturday evening secret meeting away from others. I and some of the other leaders of the renewal group, in the annual meeting, had been voted into leadership position with them on the governing board of the church. We had another annual meeting coming soon and the old timers felt that the way things had been going, if something wasn’t done to stop it, they would lose their majority on the board. They felt like we would just do *anything we wanted,* which wasn’t part of our mindset at all, or our personalities and character. We had always deferred to them and done things the way they wanted if they did not like what we proposed.

So, as we had started gaining prominence on the board, we had always talked about matters with the traditionalist. When we finished talking we would do the matter their way. We had always been supportive. Sometimes, they had done things our way but we were always unanimous no matter what the decision was. But they said that they had the Saturday night meeting to determine what to do to stop the changes in the church and get the church back to the way it was before the renewal started.

It was in Sunday’s leadership meeting, the day after their secret meeting, that they told us what they had done. They said they’d had a meeting, what they decided and why they had decided it. They were very open. That’s why I can be open about it here. On that Sunday morning, the most godly of the traditional leaders, a very fine gentleman and in my opinion a Christian, read a statement requesting that I resign from the church because, they felt, if I left everything would go back to the way it had been before I arrived.

He had the written request in his hand but he couldn’t read it. He tried to read it but choked up. To his credit, he could not read their statement. So his younger brother, also one of the traditional leaders, reached over, took the paper and read it with apparent ease.

We told them we would have an answer for them the next Sunday morning. During the week, about 30 or more of the adults in the renewal group met. As we talked about it, the feeling among the group was that we ought to do just as they requested. There were about three of us who felt that we ought not to, that we should nicely decline to resign, but almost everyone thought we should. We three said,

*“Okay, that’s what we’ll do.”*

And so, we did. Gradually those of the renewal left the church. Even though we tried to influence them to stay, by the time a year was over, the church was back to what they wanted – only the traditionalists. Most of those who left the church formed two other churches in town. Some returned to the church they had previously left. Some years later an entirely different congregation occupied that building. Whether it was sold or given to the new congregation, I don’t know. I think it was a Hispanic congregation that moved in.

So the church closed. The renewed departed from the building. Those were life-giving, spiritually alive people who went out from that church. Some went back into the churches they had come from locally. I was like a revival in town. As in the scriptures when persecution came upon the church in Jerusalem, they spread out and took the message apparently better than they had been taking it prior to the persecution.

This was indeed a form of persecution and missionary activity. We loved those people, including the traditionalists, *especially* some of the traditionalists. For example, we were close to those two brothers. The younger brother was a successful businessman in town and had appeared in good health all the time we knew him. Six months or a year later, we learned that he was in the hospital with lung cancer. Nancy and I went to the hospital to visit with him and prayed for him, which he appreciated. We told him that we loved him.

As he worsened, we went back a second time. He was badly bad sick at that point, and the family was in the room. All we did was wave from the open door. We didn’t visit him on that occasion. The first time we visited him he had asked for only one thing. *“Do you have any more books about heaven?”*

We loved those people, even at times when they did things that we didn’t appreciate personally. We saw God’s hand in all of it. And they saw God’s hand in it, too. It was from a different perspective but they saw God, too and they felt like they were doing what they should do. They asked us to leave, nicely. I tried to keep Nancy in the church when I left, since I was the only one asked to leave. She was in the choir. She stayed a few weeks but was too grieved to stay and to sing in the choir.

I even went down the street and pulled resignations from the church out of a mailbox. I had heard from some of the people that they were mailing in their resignations. I took it out of their mailbox to try to keep them in the church. We didn’t leave the church and try to put a pox on it. We left it and blessed it. God had His way of making what He had done among those people into a blessing.

That’s a quick story of Sulphur Springs in our lives which covered from November 1975 to 1979. God built up that body of interdenominational prayers into a congregation. We began to have weekly meetings. We had to divide them into 3 house groups with a leader and one or more leaders-in-training. The Lord brought up those leaders really quickly. They were qualified, godly men, good leaders wherever they were, and able to teach. Each was bringing up the next generations of leaders. The leaders were in their 40’s, close to my age, and they were bringing up leaders who were in their 20’s. They were leading, teaching, and counseling all these people. One of those young leaders became the county judge. Others were business people.

Every one of those people that I referred to were very principled people in God, doing the very best that they could and knew. I did, too. I did the very best that I could and that I knew. We were all together, whether we were with the traditionalist group or not, we worked to not have division. There were two groups, but we worked to be one.

We resisted the insertion of division into our midst. We did not have division in our hearts. That was difficult for some people.

We were there in Sulphur Springs for three years. At that point, when I was no longer involved in the church, a doctor in Athens, Texas, about 75 miles due south, asked me if I would help him in his medical practice. He was in a group practice but he had a chronic and significantly debilitating illness and having difficulty pulling his full-time duties. We had known and loved each other for several years. He had been asking me to help him in his practice. Now I was freed up to do it. I began to work with him. For three years, we lived in Sulphur Springs and I commuted to Athens three to five days a week. I would go to Athens, spending several nights during the week, and work for him.

Gradually we were no longer in Sulphur Springs, and gradually we were full-time in Athens.

The way I had gotten in contact with this doctor was through our attendance in a medical meeting in Dallas. At a dinner one evening I saw a man in his clericals, having dinner with one of the doctors. I wanted to meet that Episcopal priest, so I went over to him and introduced myself. He was a priest in Athens, Texas. The doctor he was having dinner with was a doctor from Athens. I met that doctor and he began talking to me about practicing with him. I began to travel to Athens because this doctor and this priest were in a prayer group with about several other couples. I went to Athens to teach them regularly, weekly or monthly. Soon, after we were freed from Sulphur Springs, we began to ask the Lord where we were to go. It began to boil down to Athens.

One of the things that brought that doctor and me close together was that the first time I went to his prayer group to teach, I taught them there was always *more to received from the Lord.* They were all committed Christians, most of them leaders in their church, and they had been praying for *more of the Lord.* I taught them about more of the Lord Jesus and the power of God that’s offered in lives committed ridiculously, radically to Him.

They all wanted to be prayed for to receive *that.* Before I started praying for them on that occasion, I wanted to make sure that all of them were Christians. I asked them to go around the room and each one tell me who Jesus was and is. The doctor’s wife, with whom since then we have long been very close [and that doctor has gone on home to be with the Lord] could only talk about Jesus as God and as a “distant being.” I prayed with her first about receiving the Lord and Jesus became close to her. Then I prayed for them and all were baptized in the Holy Spirit. As you might well know, that began to stir things up in their church!

We moved to Athens and into close fellowship with that doctor, his wife and a couple of other people. We had hoped it would amount to what we had experienced when we would move somewhere, meaning that the Lord would develop real community and perhaps bring it into a local church that was already established. But He didn’t. We got nowhere except to be close friends with a very small group -- not with that Bible study group that had been already formed.

In Athens, I felt like the Lord was winding me down, according to what He had done with me in the past. I felt like the Lord was putting me on the back burner, not off the stove, but on the back burner. It was something that took me awhile to be confident. Our personal spiritual growth and the ease of development of close friends continued. We soon had a very close group of friends and saints in Athens. All the time we lived there, that being 25 years, Nancy and I taught Bible studies, she shepherded ladies, I more and more intensely practiced medicine, and I continued being involved in medical organizations at local and state levels. All aspects of our lives were essential parts of our growth. It was an important place for us.

It took me a couple of years to wind down from traveling. I got into full time, standard medical practice, hospital care, nursing home, and I became the county jail doctor. The Lord intensified my medical life but also intensified His life in it. It was easy. After the years of walking with Him, being the Lord’s person and doing doctoring was pretty easy. It came natural.

A lot of my patients had their lives changed. In fact, the pastors who I would see as patients in my office, talk to, encourage and pray for, would send me patients who needed counseling and prayer. Things were good in Athens, but really intense medically. I spent two to four hours a day in the county jail, which included lots of prayer, ministry and counseling with those guys, visiting with them when they were sent on to prison. I had 100’s of patients in nursing homes and saw more people in my office than other doctors would see per day. A lot of them couldn’t get into an office to see any other doctor because they were economically and socially challenged, and so forth, but my receptionist knew that if anyone came into to see me, we would see them.

I had more patients in the hospital than any couple of doctors. I had to devote eight hours a day just to hospital care. I’d have 20-22 patients in the hospital and saw my nursing home patients, all of them, at least once a month. When they were acutely ill, I saw some of them daily. I was also the medical director of 6 nursing homes. I say that to show that the medical practice grew and grew. I would work until late at night, get home late, eat supper, go to bed, get up at 4:30, and go again. I would not go home until I had done everything that should be done that day. That continued until Nancy got ovarian cancer.

It didn’t take very long to find out what her trouble was. She was operated on in Dallas by cancer surgeons. They found that it was metastasized all over her abdomen. They could only take out the primary mass of cancer, de-bulking they call it. The prognosis was 20 to 40 months to live, with treatment. She was in the hospital most of a two-week period there. I stayed with her except for a 24-hour period when our son, Dan stayed with her.

I had to go back to Athens to do some things. First, I sat down with the sheriff and resigned as the county jail doctor. Next, I talked to a group of family practice doctors. I asked them if they would take care of my nursing home patients when I admitted them to the hospital, because I was stopping hospital care. They did. When they discharged my patients, they would dismiss them back to my care in the nursing home.

No more hospital patients and no more county jail responsibilities, that was 12 hours a day right there! At that point, my associate had already died and I was in full-time office practice, six days a week. I talked to the other doctors in my clinic, asking them if they would take my patients if I dropped office care. I really wanted to be freed up to spend time with Nancy. If it was 20 to 40 months and downhill at that, I wanted to devote all the time I could to her. They agreed to take my patients, so I also no longer had an office practice. It was almost traumatic to a doctor who had no office practice. It’s like not being a real doctor!

*“Where’s your office?”*

“I don’t have one.”

*“What kind of doctor are you, without an office!?”*

I became a geriatric specialist and got to know quite a bit about geriatric care. I was the medical director at six of the eight nursing homes where I had patients. I became certified nationally as a Certified Medical Director and became the president of the Texas Medical Directors Association. I progressed upward in that field.

But Nancy didn’t die. When we got her diagnosis and the prognosis of 20-40 months, the first night we were home I got on my knees beside Nancy and said,

*“Lord, if You take her, I absolutely trust You that it would be the best thing. It would be the best decision in all of creation and eternity for You to take her. And it would be the best thing for me to be without her. You do only perfect things. Not one cell in her body could have cancer except You said, ‘Have cancer.’ You are absolutely the Lord of ALL things. I am for You, Lord. If You take her, I will love You and trust You and serve You all the rest of my life. It will make no difference.”*

I absolutely put her in His hands. Although He knows all thing before they happen, and knew what I was going to say next, I felt like I had to utter the full truth of what was going on inside me.

*“But You know, Lord, I would like to have her for a long time here.”*

After her surgery, while still in the hospital, she had her first of six chemotherapy treatments. They were once a month for a total of six. She got her last 5 chemotherapies in Tyler, Texas, having to be there 2 days each time. When she went into the hospital for that second chemotherapy they tested and scanned her. There was no more evidence of cancer in her body. Scans didn’t show any more cancer, physical examination showed no more cancer, and the CA-125 blood marker for ovarian cancer which had been over 3,600 was in the normal range.

She had all six of her chemotherapies, as difficult as they were on her physically. At all of her follow-ups over the next 10-15 years, they said,

*“Forget it. You don’t need to come back any more. You’re well.”*

The Lord just healed her. For years as a doctor walking with the Lord, I meant the same thing when I said,

*“The medicine healed her or surgery healed her or God healed her. It’s all the Lord.”*

It was all in one. Since I first started walking with the Lord I never divided any healing between medicine, surgery or the Lord having done it. When I say, *“The Lord healed her,”* I mean I’m thankful to the doctors and all involved. When someone gives you a drink of water or food when you’re hungry, it’s not enough to say, *“Thank you”* to the person. It’s also, “*Thank you, Lord.”* No matter what, for whatever we call good or bad, He turns it good. We don’t have to stumble over that one. We don’t have to wait until it looks good to *know* that it’s good.

Nancy’s bout with cancer was about 25 years ago. To this day I very much enjoy her presence.

Part 10 February 4, 2014

Catch up testimonies:

Early in our walk with the Lord, He showed us that He could communicate so good with us that we could not only hear Him, but quote Him. He was also an actual mental, physical, and relationship healer. He did things like that anytime He wanted to. He was very eager to work in our lives as we went through our usual days. We didn’t have to set up a time for God to do something. Just in the ongoing hours of our day He would step right into the day in ways we might call miraculous -- little or big.

One day back in the neighborhood of Church of the Redeemer, where we learned to walk with Him, I needed to quickly get to the other side of a chain link fence. I didn’t have time to go around to a gate. I ran up to the fence and was going to vault over the top. As I got close to the fence, the Lord said, *“You’re going to cut your hand.”*

He didn’t say, *“Be careful”* or *“Don’t.”* It was just a bit of information which didn’t alarm me in the slightest. I did put my hand where I thought it might not get cut, but as soon as I put it on the top of the fence and vaulted over, I realized my right hand was being cut in the palm. We took care of the emergency [a fight] on the other side. In the next couple of days, as I was working in the office, I noticed that the cut on my hand wasn’t healing. It was red and by that afternoon, there were red streaks running up my arm nearly to my elbow.

When I saw that, I just said,

*“Lord, that’s Your hand. You do with it what You want.”*

When I went home that evening, the redness and swelling around the wound were gone and the wound was about ¾ healed. The Lord did just those kinds of things, I guess, just to be an encouragement to us. “Keep going, keep going. I can take care of these things. Keep going.”

One night I was visiting in a home down the street talking to a fellow. He, his wife and one child had come into fellowship in the church. They had gotten a house in the neighborhood. I was an encourager to him. I knew he was having a particular personal difficulty, so I was down the street talking to him. As we talked about his situation, it came out that he was in financial difficulty, also.

At that time we were in our first year in Houston, having moved from private practice in Galveston county to the neighborhood of the Church of the Redeemer in south Houston. For one year, the doctors I had been in practice with were sending me a check once a month, a dwindling check based on my accounts receivable. After one year, they were going to stop. It was a big amount the first month and I got smaller and smaller after that. We didn’t need that much money, but we knew people who did need it. The money either went directly to the church or directly to people who needed it. My accountant had told me, “Bob, you should hang onto some of that money. You’re going to need some of it to pay your income taxes.”

But that night I saw that my friend needed $1000 dollars and I knew that’s all that amount, but only that amount. I thought, based on my tax accountant’s report, that $1000 dollars wasn’t going to do *any* good towards my taxes. So I committed to his need for $1000 and brought the check back to him that night. We were back to nothing, and that was the last of my one year of accounts receivable checks.

When I got back to the house that evening I got a call from the accountant. He was a Christian. He said*,*

*“Bob, I’ve gone over your income tax three times and I can’t figure it out. The government owes you money!”*

Again, the Lord just did those kinds of things. As far as we were concerned, He was making money out of thin air. Then there was an attorney who had been raised and had lived most of his life close with the Lord. He began visiting the church. I had met him but I didn’t know anything about him. He had been counseling with the pastor about some things in his life having to do with his law practice, having to do with handling different private estate funds and having taken money out and using it for himself. Before his thefts were noticed, he would take money from another estate fund, always moving money around like that and getting further in debt all the time. I knew none of that about him.

As he had come into fellowship in the church, he had been repenting of that sin and trying to pay it off. He had decided that he was not going to move any more money, and that he would take his lumps legally. At that very time, the Lord told me to give him $5000.00, which now would be the equivalent of $15-20K. I called him and told him,

*“The Lord is telling me to give you $5000.00. Where are you?”*

He said, “I’d like to come by to talk to you.”

He came by the house and I gave him his check. He asked me,

“Are you sure it was the Lord who told you to give me this $5K?”

I thought that was a strange question but I said,

*“Yes, it was the Lord.”*

It was later I that found out that that amount was exactly how much he needed. He had told the pastor how much he needed, and he thought quite logically that the pastor had told me and therefore, I was doing it. The Master Pastor knew about his need and his commitment, so He was cleaning up his life. He and the Lord were working on it together, and allowed me to share in the action.

In just a short time beginning after that very first Saturday evening after-supper testimony by the minister, within about two months, I had manifested all of the gifts of the Spirit. It was like going through the Holy Spirit’s smorgasbord. I had begun reading the scriptures but now I *believed* the scriptures. When I read the list of the gifts of the Spirit, what I saw was that Jesus died to give me those precious gifts. I wanted them for *His* sake.

So I was hungry for them. I didn’t want them for myself or even for ministry. I wanted them for His sake. I didn’t want anything that He put on my table to go stale.

*(word of knowledge testimony)* Two of us were at a young lady’s house. She was visiting a family in the neighborhood of the church. She had been visiting and attending some of the services, and had been drawing close with the Lord. She asked for some counseling and two of us went for an evening visit. We talked probably for two hours. *(This was after we finished up with things at home and the kids went to bed. Then men were free to began having meetings, doing counseling and so forth.)* This was a late night time, so we talked for a couple of hours. She was responsive but not really open to receive what we were talking about because we were talking about things of the cross and accepting the cross in her life. She was not responsive to taking up her own cross and bearing it daily.

I began asking the Lord for a breakthrough. She was a very accomplished singer, secular and religious. Finally, the Lord told me,

*“Tell her to give up her singing.”*

Her self-identity was big. Like my identity had been pretty much as a doctor, hers was as a vocalist. I said*,*

*“You know what the Lord wants you to do?”*

At that point she looked like she was really ready She said,

“What?”

*“He wants you to give up your singing.”*

She broke down crying and said,

“Yes, I know.”

And she did give it up. Completely. About a year or so later, after being totally involved in the daily community life of the church and developing a new identity as God’s daughter, she began to sing in the choir. The Lord had her pick up her ministry, but singing wasn’t her identity anymore. Her identity was child of God.

On one of our short trips to Mexico I took along the brother who had been a schizophrenic, but whom the Lord had healed. He had thought he was the fourth person of the quadrupy. Instead of God being three persons of the Trinity, he believed he was the fourth of the quadrupy. He had worn his shirts backwards so that it looked somewhat like he was wearing a clerical collar. When he first came into fellowship at the church he would roar like a lion and go into convulsions when he heard the name of Jesus. The Lord had delivered him of his demons and healed him of his schizophrenia.

But he went to Mexico with me on one of those short trips. God had given us a tremendous relationship with priests in that area, and by that time also with the Papal Nuncio to Mexico and the local bishop. On this trip the two of us were coming out of the mountains on one of those all-purpose buses. One of the local priests came out with us. All three of us were going up to the state capital.

We rode together, then checked into our little Mexican hotel. Our plane departed the next day. Kerry, the healed brother, got sick. H had the heaves. It was just a one room, a fairly small room at that, that the three of us were sharing. The bathroom door was open and Kerry was standing bent over the commode vomiting, and vomiting. I became concerned about him, more than just regular sickness and vomiting because he appeared to be weakened and about to fall. I stepped in the open doorway and stood next to him, putting my arm around him as he was bent over. I held him steady.

I looked up in the room at our brother, the priest. He had this struck, blank look on his face. Until you’ve seen it a few times, it’s hard to recognize what’s going on inside the soul of the person. So I asked him,

*“Fr. Raul, what are you thinking?”*

This was the priest whom the Lord had miraculously healed on what looked like to be his death bed. He was about our age, in our 30’s. He said,

“I’ve never seen two men who loved each other so much.”

I thought*, “This is nothing. Come stay with us for awhile in Houston at our church and you’ll see real love and what the real expense of loving people is.”* Just that, the Lord had set up a display which to the priest was the most loving display between two men he had ever seen in his life. Only God can do *that* with a little thing and little people like that!

As we continued in life together, we knew that God could do all these things just out of our normal life. Some of them would be through difficulties and others would just flow with no difficulty.

I’ve never felt like God had a sense of humor. I don’t see God laughing in humor , *“Hahaha,”* like that. God is shown to laugh but it is laughter of derision when puny earthlings try to thwart Him and His plans. I don’t see humorous laughter in Jesus’ life, which doesn’t mean He had some kind of defect in His soul. It was just part of His Perfection. He was serious. He knew the situations of eternity and that it was focused on Him. He knew he was headed to the cross and He knew the way to walk there. *NONE* of that was humorous to Him. So I don’t see in that scripture that the Lord had a sense of humor. People who think that He did engage in humor are probably those who see good, quality, usable humor when used at the right time and the right way, not at someone’s expense. There is a time and place for humor – until you are more adequately gripped by God’s call to be holy.

I think when the devil is on your back, or he’s trying to get on your back or somebody else’s back, and you are engaged consciously in spiritual battles for yourself and others, you don’t find many things funny. You’re pretty serious and you simply lead a wholesome life of sobriety. That leads up to this next little story.

I had lots of nursing home patients, hundreds of them. Together, with all the other things I was doing as a doctor in different areas of medicine, it took a lot of hours to take care of them right. I was ready to go home one evening probably around 8 o’clock or so. I got a call from a nursing home nurse saying that two daughters of one of my vegetative patients were at the nursing home and were hoping I would come by for a visit, do an examination on their mom, and give them an up-to-date report on her condition. The daughters were visiting from out of town. They hoped to see and talk to me in person about their mother’s care.

*“Tell them I will be there as soon as I finish up in the nursing home where I am.”*

So I went by. They were nice enough to wait. It was about 9:30 or so, I guess. They asked if I would check Mama and give them an up-to-date report. We all went into Mom’s room. The nurse, two daughters, and I gathered around the bed. I checked her from head to toe. While doing the exam I told the Lord that I must be hard-hearted because I was in the midst of their family tragedy and my main thought was to do a good job and get home. The exam showed nothing new about Mom. They didn’t really expect anything new. It was that they were living with broken hearts over Mom’s condition. They really looked after her closely, although from out of town.

I turned to them and gave them the report. They were quite satisfied and thankful. I think we prayed before we left the room. We all walked out into the hallway and down to the nurse’s station which had a high counter on it. The nurse gave me the chart to write on. I was thinking, *“Mama being like she is and these two girls are so dedicated. I confess, Lord, I’m not brokenhearted a bit. It seems like tonight it’s just another job and another patient.”* I was just talking silently to the Lord as I wrote on the patient’s chart. A bead of sweat rolled off my forehead and into my right eye. The concentrated sweat burned like fire. I batted my eyes. Another one rolled down into my left eye. It burned that eye! I batted my eyes seeking relief. Soon my nose started running. The nurse started sniffing; then the two ladies started sniffing. Soon we had a full-fledged sniffing and eye watering late night nursing home party. They must have thought they had the most tenderhearted doctor that they could have ever entrusted Mama to. I didn’t tell them otherwise. I told the Lord,

*“Lord, You did it. I’m not going to mess it up.”*

In all things, no matter what we call little or big, God does wonderful things in them if we will simply relax and walk with Him. Love one another.

While I was downstairs one day in that medical clinic in the port area of Houston, where the Lord was teaching me how to be the kind of doctor son that He wanted me to be, (the bottom floor was the doctors’ offices, the second floor was the hospital,) I heard that there was a patient emergency upstairs. A patient had a cardiac arrest. I went scooting upstairs and went to the patient’s room. Two doctors were already in the room working on the patient, attempting to resuscitate a little boy who appeared to be about 10-12 years old. He had just had his appendix removed and had been brought back to the room. Then his heart had stopped.

When I saw that everything was being done that could be done, I decided to look for the family to see if there was anything I could do to help them. A few doors down was a small waiting room in which was a mother, father, and a couple of other kids, all on their knees praying. Their prayer was,

*“Thank You, Father, for letting us have him these years.”*

They were not anxiously praying for his resuscitation, and he was not resuscitated. He died. They were thanking God for the blessing that He had given them for those years. They were linked into eternal-quality values of this earth life.

“The horse was standing on their foot” but they weren’t worried about that. It was a painful moment but it wasn’t their focus.

When the horse is standing on your foot, you find out whether the Lord or you and your foot are life’s focus. It’s not easy in the flesh to say*, “Lord, thank you for this situation. I can see it’s bringing out praises to You, despite its pain.”* You say, All things are designed for us to give You thanks and praise. I will do that*. It would be nice to have this horse off my foot but praise You Lord, I will grow in this painful time.”* It’s not easy to stay oriented to the Lord during trials if we are living and walking in the flesh most of the time. How we do in trials, especially in sudden trials, is kind of a report card from Him to show us how we are doing.

(Sulphur Springs testimony) I never did go into regular medical practice for the nearly three years we lived in Sulphur Springs, Texas. For a couple of those years, I did work as the health clinic doctor for a university about 30 miles away, and assisted other physicians during surgery on their patients, but I didn’t open a regular practice because we weren’t there for that purpose. We were there for forming up a community of God’s people. A group of solid believers had formed loosely as a prayer and Bible Study group but they had seen and tasted more of a Christian community at Church of the Redeemer and they wanted that. So my household was sent there to help that come about.

Soon after we arrived, I was asked to give a talk to the medical staff at the hospital. Probably 20 doctors attended the staff meeting. I told them about my clinic in Houston, how it developed and how we operated. Part of my talk was about our not sending out bills to people. If they had insurance, we would take it. Otherwise, they could pay what they wanted and could.

Some of those doctors that evening were very hostile. I didn’t think this way at the time, but it’s kind of like Jesus speaking to the Pharisees; talking about love, getting more flexible with their canned way of looking at scripture and so forth. But at the time, I was surprised that quality people like them, dedicated small town physicians, practically all of them family doctors would respond strongly negatively. I expected a warm response, although one practice style does not fit all practices. But there was one doctor in particular who was boiling mad at me personally. I heard several times that he absolutely hated me because of the way I practiced as a doctor before I came to Sulphur Springs.

After being in town for awhile, probably for a year or so, I was at the hospital for a meeting one day and was about to leave. I asked that doctor if he would give me a ride home or I was going to call Nancy for a ride. He agreed that he would.

As soon as we got into his pickup truck, I asked him if there was anything I needed to know about myself, and would he please tell me. That invitation was all that was needed. It wasn’t but a 10-12 minute drive but during those few minutes he said all manner of bad things. I noticed that he didn’t say anything about anything I was doing wrong. He just said bad things about me; things that were attitude based.

I listened to him. When he hit on something that I knew was at least partially true, where God was working on my soul, I said,

*“You’re right.”*

I wouldn’t say, “You’re a little bit right but, ‘You are *right. I need to hear that. Tell me more*.’” He just went from one thing to another. I think he got into every area of my soul. He really dumped on me. Additionally, before we got home a hail storm started. The pickup was not insulated and when these big pieces of hail hit the roof, it was really like 50 people with hammers beating on it. When we got to the house, I couldn’t get out. It was really heavy hail. So for 20 or 30 minutes, I sat in that truck with him. It was like the Lord saying,

*“Stay a little longer. Soak it in.”*

So I got some clear understandings. I had to dismiss a lot of what he said. I learned that the Lord, particularly if we invite the Lord to speak through different venues, He will make things really clear to us. At length He will make them clear and drive them home to make them clear *if* we want to hear. If we don’t want to hear because we know a person doesn’t like us, thinking, *“I sure don’t want to get around him,”* then we lose. By asking people whom I knew didn’t like me or kind of didn’t like me, I learned what God had perhaps been already saying, that I may have been missing or not been so impressed with when God had whispered it in my ear.

At pretty much everywhere we’ve been for very long, the Lord would show me that there is a tester. There’s one particular person who has the valuable office of “tester” in that area or in that church. It’s not like, “Watch out for that person” or “Don’t get around them,” but “Be nice to that person.” Being nice may not change anything other than myself because the tester is determined to find fault with you and to pester you. Many folks don’t look at testers’ motivation and deeds in this way but theirs is one of the most beneficial ministries in the body of Christ. Don’t get me wrong. Their ministry does not benefit the tester in this life or the next. It has a negative impact on that person. It’s unrighteous. It’s sin. But it does benefit everyone else if we will let it. If we will listen to and be open to that person, we can benefit.

Part 11

One of the most effective and essential ministries in a righteous congregation of believers is that of Tester. I call it Tester because that is a good one-word description of the ministry. The Tester is a person who tests the righteousness of others by gossiping, complaining, challenging, and generally being obnoxious. The Tester has few friends, if any, which provides the Tester with proof that everyone is exactly like the Tester says they are. I say “righteous” church because the loving, spiritually perceptive, forgiving and cross bearing church will continually grow in godliness under the Tester’s ministry. Of course, the Tester receives no eternal reward for his/her ministry. Quite the contrary; there is eventual and painful judgment if repentance and confession do not come before leaving this world.

Example: This Tester was interruptive at my Bible studies and Sunday school classes. I suppose she was the same at other times. She would say ugly things about me to other people. Of course, she was [mostly] wrong. Word would soon get back to me. It had not taken me long to identify her ministry and to begin benefitting from it. I was being nice to her and exercising a good level of forgiveness and fellowship. Finally, as her ministry continued, I wrote her a letter and told her what great value she was to the Lord, to that congregation, and that I thought she belonged and had a definite ministry. I didn’t tell her the flip side of the coin. I told her that I appreciated her, which I did, and I elaborated on her positives. She showed that letter all over the church and around town.

The result: She lost her ministry. She began to change for the better. Others’ love for her began to have good effect. I wasn’t trying to get her off my back. [Really!!] I was trying to reinforce her positively with the truth in love.

We approached life with the Lord as babes, especially in the beginning of our spiritual walk. I think that’s a way of phrasing what is essential if we are going to go very far with the Lord. In the life of the Spirit, it’s essential that you be a babe. I had to learn to integrate that with being a responsible adult and a practicing physician. I had to be a babe. That’s part of what I have to say in this story, of being a babe to the Lord.

I’ve had ample opportunity over the years to be high up in the state medical organizations. I was a director on statewide medical organizations and numerous committees, but I always stopped at those levels. Higher offices took more time and effort than I had or wanted to offer. So I wouldn’t go any further. I retired at age 70. I’m almost 85 now. After being retired about two years, and I was still very active, but not medically. I received a phone call and then a visit from the head office of one of the state medical organizations, the Texas Medical Directors Association. They asked if I would be the Association’s president. I looked at my life and I thought,

*“I don’t have an excuse this time. I have time.”*

I went back into the medical scene. When I would give a talk, I would testify to reality, to the Spirit-led life. Whether it was in our annual meetings where there were 100’s of doctors present or at our board meetings, to some degree I would give testimony to the Lord in a non-religious but spiritual sense. I felt like Moses being recalled to active duty at age 80, and like Abraham at age 100. That was another bit of evidence that God can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, if we remain available to Him.

I was always glad to turn down things that did not directly enhance my medical and spiritual activities.

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Early on, before we moved from Galveston County to Houston and Church of the Redeemer, I remember how the Lord treated us -- like little bitty babies. Every “Waah,” every cry on our part, resulted in our diapers being changed right away and a bottle being put in our mouth by the Lord. That changed in due time.

As we grew up, we became more responsible generally and more responsible for walking the way of the cross instead of remaining a baby believer. That was necessary if the Lord was going to show Himself in our lives. We had to be taken off of milk and learn to eat meat.

But early-on every time I read the scriptures, the Lord spoke to me from those scriptures about myself. It was instruction, directions, correction or whatever He decided I needed. I did some “Bible diving” at the time, meaning that I would open my Bible, put my finger down somewhere and look to see what the Lord said. That kind of thing was and is for spiritual babies -- very little babies. It’s a baby practice.

This is one of those early examples. I had been fasting. I think by that time, I had been fasting for about two days, taking water and a slice of dry toast three times daily, and working full-time. Nancy and others were asking me how long my fast was to be. I said that I didn’t know. I got curious and asked the Lord, “*How long do you want me to fast?”*

I felt like I was supposed to Bible dive. I held my Bible above my head, not wanting to influence the choice of the verse, and let it fall open. I reached up overhead and put my finger on the opened page, then brought down my Bible. I had to turn it around because it was upside down. The verse under my finger was Exodus 34:18. That was the first month that I had begun to walk with the Lord, and it was January. The verse said:

*“You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.”*

The month of Abib was the first month of the Jewish year. The Jewish calendar months do not coincide with our calendar, but it was very clear to me that I was to fast on bread and water for seven days. I did.

He treated us like little babes. We were and still are babes; but more mature babes. Whatever that is.

Part 12 February 4, 2014

Sometimes the Lord would tell us to go somewhere nearby, like around Houston. At other times He would send us somewhere around the state or the United States. He would tell us to go to a certain place or to a certain person and to do certain things. And we would do them. And He would do things. Then He began to tell us to go to places that were out of the country, such as to Northern Ireland.

It began by my attending a Bible study and prayer meeting at a convent, where most of the attendees of the meeting were Irish nuns of the convent. On that occasion they were really burdened about all the bad news coming out of Northern Ireland. Catholics and Protestants were fighting, killing and burning. When I went home that night, I was burdened for the same thing. In medical terms, I had caught their contagion.

I shared it with a brother, Bob West, who had been with me on other trips, like to Mexico, which I’ve already related. He also caught the burden. We decided we would spend some time praying about it. We prayed over a period of a few weeks and the Lord confirmed it. He wanted us to go to Northern Ireland and share our personal and church testimony in Jesus Christ with religious and political leaders there. He told us when to go and how long to stay.

Bob, my buddy, had a dream or a vision at night about looking out of an upstairs window in a city. In the distance he saw hills covered with greenish-blue grass. He looked down at the street. It was a wide boulevard. He looked up the street a little way and saw a building that was three or four-stories tall with a second story balcony. A uniformed soldier stood on the balcony. Someone walking on the street threw rocks up at the soldier and the soldier ran into the building. The person ran off as if to escape the soldier.

That was all it was. We assumed that it was Northern Ireland and that the Lord would make something important of the dream. So we went. We invited a young minister at the church to accompany us. He had been at the church for about a year or so, having spent the immediate three years in Melawi, Africa as a missionary. Fr. Jeff Schiffmayer caught the burden. He went with us.

We landed at the airport in Belfast, Northern Ireland and checked into the hotel. Bob walked over to the window. He hadn’t recognized it, but the street was a broad boulevard. Off in the distance he saw hills that were covered with blue-green grass. He looked to the right and saw a building like the one he had seen in his dream. But there was no soldier or anyone on the street throwing rocks at a soldier. We decided the Lord was telling us that we were in the right place. Little things like that were encouragements!

We rested a bit and said, *“Let’s get about it!”* We went walking around town. Several blocks away we came to a large building that looked like a city hall. It was a governmental building that was, indeed, Belfast City Hall. We walked up to the back of it. There were several steps leading to a porch with large columns. A workman-type man was there. We asked him what was the building. He said,

*“It’s the city hall.”*

And he recognized our accents.

In a friendly manner he asked, *“What are you Yanks doing here in Belfast?”*

“We are here to share our Christian testimony with religious and political leaders.”

*“You’ve come to the right place on the right day. This is* *the one day of the month when the city leaders meet and I know them all. I’m a labor lobbyist. When they come out, they’ll come out here in back where their cars are parked and I will introduce you to them”*

In a little while they started coming out and he did introduce us to them. We made appointments to visit with them. That was pretty quick. We had landed only about 2 hours previously. The Lord just set that up. The next day we thought, “You know, we didn’t really thank that guy. We got all busy talking to the city council people. Let’s go back and see if we can find him so we can thank hi.” He wasn’t there, but one of his compadres was there. We visited with him awhile and he said,

*“Have you visited the botanical gardens while you are here?”*

“No, we haven’t.”

*“Well, you ought to see the botanical gardens.”*

“We are not really doing the regular tourist thing. We are here to share our testimony with religious and political leaders.”

*“Well, you ought to see the botanical gardens.”*

“Thank you very much. I think we’ll pass on the botanical gardens.”

*“You really SHOULD see the botanical gardens.”*

At that point, I recognized that the Lord was telling me to go to the botanical gardens. I had been in that situation several times before in my walk with Him, where people would step all the way out of the reasonableness of a new relationship and begin to tell me what I should do.

“Okay.”

*“I will take you part of the way there.”*

He went with us about three or four blocks.

*“You can’t miss it. Go down this street. It’s straight ahead.”*

I thought I would be nice to him and buy him a cup of tea before we separated. There were two little restaurants right there on the street where we were.

“Which one of these restaurants should we try?”

*“Oh, across the street, there’s a train station. It’s a nice place for a cup of tea.”*

We went across the street, walked into the big lobby of the train station and he looked over in a certain area. I could see that it hadn’t changed in a long, long time. He said,

*“Well, just recently, right over there was a tea shop.”*

Like I said, it didn’t look like there had ever been a tea shop in there, ever. He was standing facing me and looking over my shoulder where he could see people coming off the train*.*

*“But here comes the Chairman of the Socialist Party. I know him. I’ll introduce you to him.”*

Now the Socialist party was the biggest political party. We walked over to him and our lobbyist friend introduced us to the Chairman of the Socialist party, who invited us to come home with him. So we went home with him and shared our Christian testimony. Following the Lord is often accomplished through being nice to people. Through patience the Lord develops things *that only He can develop.* We never went to the botanical gardens.

One evening, as it got to be about 9:30 or 10:00, Jeff Schiffmayer, Bob and I decided that we wanted to go where the Catholics and Protestants were having all their troubles -- burning out houses, fighting, shooting, breaking knees, and the like. We asked the hotel desk clerk where that area of time was. He told us, adding that it wasn’t good to go there, particularly at night. We decided we’d go.

It was only about six blocks so we hiked it. In Belfast they had what they called the “Peace Line,” which was a four-block separation between the Catholic street, (Shankhill Rd) and the Protestant street (Falls Rd.). They were named roads but they were busy streets. In between the two of them was that “Peace Line,” which was where the British Army was located, keeping the peace as much as possible by keeping the Catholics and Protestants apart. The soldiers were there behind their sandbag placements. We walked for a way down Falls Rd, which was the Catholic road, and everything looked pretty much normal for that time of the night. There were people walking around, cars on the street, lights on, and so forth. We cut across the Peace Line. It was dark. All the lights were out and it was a very dark night. We had to be careful how we walked even though it was on streets and sidewalks. We could see our hand in front of our face, and see how to walk safely, but if you met someone whom you knew, you couldn’t recognize them. Their face would be obscure.

As we walked along we heard the British soldiers talking behind their sandbags. They may have had night vision goggles and were looking us over. We passed two men standing in a recessed entrance to a building. I could not discern it, but it was a church. Their doorway was recessed from the sidewalk perhaps 10 or 12 feet. As we walked by them, the Lord said, *“Talk to that man.”*

I knew He was talking about the tall, thin one. We walked a little further while I was deciding for sure if it was the Lord. I decided it was. I stopped Jeff Schiffmayer and my buddy, Bob West, and told them I believed the Lord wanted us to talk to those guys back there, particularly the tall, thin one. They said “okay” and we went back. I walked up to them, offered my hand to the tall man and said,

*“I’m Bob Eckert from Houston, Texas.”*

The other Bob did the same thing. Then Jeff Schiffmayer walked up and said,

*“I’m Jeff Schiffmayer from Houston, Texas”* and the tall thin guy said,

*“Jeff Schiffmayer! From Malawi? It’s me; Bill Jackson!”*

They had been on the missionary field together. It was so dark that they could not recognize one another. One of the first things Bill said, was, *“What are you doing here in Northern Ireland?”* We told him we were there to share our testimony with religious and political leaders.

*“Well, I’m sure glad you came! I meet every week with Protestant and Catholic minister here in Belfast. We pray together over our problems. Would you attend and speak with us?”*

“Of course, we would.”

And so, we did, twice. They really soaked up what we had to say about God’s people living together. As one point we were telling them that back at our church in Houston, we had many Christian denominations on staff and in fellowship ministering, teaching, counseling, and preaching. It was an Episcopal Church but we had not only Episcopal ministers and lay ministers; we had Catholic priests, Presbyterian, Baptist, Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Methodist and others that I cannot accurately recall at this writing. They often asked us questions but at that point they asked a lot of questions.

One of the three of us “Yanks” always had the answer to their questions and they were so edified by our testimony. But when I told them that we had all these people of different denominations who worshiped and ministered together, the question right away was,

*“What do you do about all the differences?”*

I thought about that a bit. I was surprised that I didn’t have the answer. I looked over at Bob. Neither did he have the answer. All was quiet. I looked at Jeff and he was quiet. We were all trying to think. *“What do we do about it?”*

Finally, Jeff had the answer.

“We don’t do anything about it.”

Almost as a chorus there was an, “*Oh!” It had come as a revelation; a complete answer.*

The Holy Spirit showed them what it meant to not do anything about it, to live together in peace. We didn’t have to do anything about it because that was a quality of love for each other and our obedience to the Lord. There *wasn’t* anything that had to be done about it. We had good times with those ministers.

One day we decided we would go over and walk around the campus of Queens College in Belfast. We were walking three abreast down this wide sidewalk as we were approaching a man who was coming towards us. He also had on a white clerical collar like Jeff did. He had this big radiant smile on his face like *“we were his long lost brothers”* type of smile. We introduced ourselves. It happened that he was the chaplain of the Church of England there on the campus of Queens College.

He asked us if we would come to speak to his student group that met at night. We did. We talked to them about the Lord for two or three nights. Every night before each meeting was over the students were all laying on the floor, just bawling before the Lord. We would get down on our knees, praise the Lord and pray. The Lord’s presence was so good. We enjoyed those meetings because they were real solid times in the Lord.

That was in 1971. It was probably 20 years later that someone sent me an article out of a religious magazine published in Northern Ireland. It was a report on the Northern Ireland revival and its origin. It had begun in 1971 on the campus of Queens College in Belfast. It had broken out on the campus and had transformed so many of the students that when they graduated and went back to their counties, revival had spread across Northern Ireland.

Also, after we moved to Corpus Christi, TX in 2009, we visited a church in San Antonio, Texas. I talked at a noon time gathering about Northern Ireland. After my talk, a lady in the congregation came up to me and asked me, “Are you the Bob Eckert who went to Northern Ireland and knows Father Cecil Kerr­­­?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what happened to him after that? He resigned his position at Queens College and opened a retreat center on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. For years it has been an important center for spiritual renewal. People came from both directions to the retreat center. Now he’s in a nursing home with Alzheimer’s disease.”

Since then, I’ve heard that he has died. And by the way, he had explained to us before we left Belfast why he had that great big smile on his face and had been so receptive to having us talk to his flock. He had had a dream very recently and in the dream, he was walking down the sidewalk where he encountered three Yanks walking towards him, one wearing a clerical collar. In his dream the Lord said to him, *“Listen to them.”* He had seen us in his dream and had received instructions from the Lord on what he should do with us..

It’s just really something how the Lord puts things together and then gives us reports. Sometimes the reports come many years later, sometimes the day after, if that’s what we need to know. The Lord is an encourager.

In fact, that Anglican minister, Cecil Kerr, came to Houston and spent a month or so with us in our church. Then he went back to Ireland and began that retreat center ministry.

So, God is looking for babes who don’t mind acting like babes and don’t mind being considered by “un-babes” of being childish.

That night after we crossed the Peace Line, having left Bill Jackson and having arranged our meeting with the Catholic and Protestant ministers, we continued our walk over to the Protestant street, Shankhill Road, just the three of us Yanks. As had the Catholic street, this one also appeared to have normal late-night activity. As soon as we stepped into the light we were surrounded by a mob of perhaps 10 young men. They were focusing on Jeff, the one of us who was wearing a clerical collar. They thought he was a Catholic minister. They got right in his face.

*“What are you doing on our street? We don’t go on your street! Get off ours.”*

Jeff perceived what the problem was and explained that he was an Anglican Episcopal minister from the United States.

*“Oh, well, in that case…” and they started turning around to go away from him.*

“Wait a minute! Come back here!” Jeff said.

He started talking to them, not talking down to them, but telling them things about loving one another. Jeff gathered them close in and, after talking to them for about 10 minutes, he prayed for them. As you might expect when God sets something up, they were moved on by the Lord. They all had teary eyes, softened hearts, and apparently changed minds. We never saw any of those guys again but that which the Lord does He does well and eternally. He had done it. God had sent Jeff there for that topping on our evening.

Before we left for Northern Ireland, Jeff had said,

*“It sure would nice if I could meet the Anglican Bishop while we are there.”*

One day as we walked into the lobby of our hotel, the Anglican Bishop was walking out. Jeff had researched him before we left Houston, so recognized him as the bishop. He talked with him briefly, having the conversation that he had hoped for. That’s all Jeff had asked.

Part 13

In my experience, the church should be doing things in the world that the world desperately needs, mostly to do for itself. We experienced that as God grabbed each one of us and we allowed ourselves to be committed together, to one another and to the Lord. That’s a costly thing, too.

For example, when we had heard everything from the Lord that we perceived He wanted to tell us before we left, we weren’t going to leave just on God’s word that had been heard by only the two of us. We had no doubts about the accuracy of our hearing what the Lord had said, but we were part of a body. At our next elders’ meeting, and I was one of the elders, we took about an hour to lay out how God had spoken to us, what we understood that the Lord had said for us to do, and then we said to the elders,

*“We are not going unless there’s 100% agreement that it is the Lord who is sending us and that we have heard accurately all that He has to say to us.”*

No; we did not check with one another on every decision, but on all larger and more important ones we did, and anything about which we were indefinite. It was just the way we did things. It was our way of life**.**

It was incongruous to be the body of Christ and do otherwise, Jesus being our Head and our functional leader. His word could be no different in one place or to one person than another. He is the Head for each one of us and He deals and speaks with each of us, but His Word says that *WE* [pleural] have the mind of Christ. Each independent one of us at times will have the mind of Christ, I believe, but WE *have the mind of Christ* is a much more positive and accurate application of that word. It seems good to us and the Holy Spirit.

So we would not go, or none of these things would happen, without being submitted to the head of the church and the church’s God-appointed human leadership. So, we found ourselves, by God’s grace, doing things in the world that the world should have been doing, and knew it should have been doing, like starting a medical clinic in Mexico. We were there at that clinic and with a Mexican doctor until the federal clinic came in and started doing what had been needed for years.

Because Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth now, more things should be done on earth like they are in heaven now. But such is not the case. Heaven is certainly not earth and earth is certainly not heaven, but there should be more similarities and we should be doing more than praying for those similarities. Jesus gave us the prayer to pray for this particular problem but we should do more than just pray. Besides, that which God wants to be done should often be done by the church. The world is so much more imperfect than the church, so we can’t lay it on the world that it should to be doing certain things, particularly if we don’t give them the reasons and the examples.

In Mexico, God broke down the barriers between us and the priests, the people who had run out all of the Protestants who had come before we arrived. They didn’t run us out, and for good reason. We weren’t what they disliked as Protestants.

The world should try to duplicate Christian works, such as the medical clinic we started in Houston. They ought to open public health clinics, but when a Christian organization does it according to Christ [godly character, self-sacrifice, quality care] it’s tangibly different.

Part 14

A dream:

There was a countryside, a nice little river, clear water, high banks with trees, and the river went along wider and narrower, wider and narrower, just a beautiful little river).

I wanted to go fishing in that river. I was able to see it well from where I was, and said, “Oh, that’s a nice place to fish, the water is deeper, probably good fishing right there.” I was driving to it. It shouldn’t have taken anytime to get there, but in a dream, things can be disproportionate. I was driving toward it on a two-lane road, like a farm to market road. It was not far from the river. Then there was a truck and another truck behind that truck. Then there was me.

So time was passing. I wanted to go fishing! I wanted to catch some fish! Finally, the truck that I was directly behind pulled out to go around the other truck. I thought, “All I need to do is follow that truck.” As it gradually made its way past the other truck I began thinking, “He may just pull back in lane in time to avoid a head-on collision, which would leave me all exposed here.”

He did that and pulled in real quickly because there were some oncoming cars. The front oncoming car stopped to let the truck and then me scoot in. I thought as I was following that truck around, “This is really foolish. This would have been disastrous if that other car had not stopped and let me pull in.”

I woke up having actually narrowly missed having a wreck in the way I had responded. Just a night or two before, I had a very similar dream that woke me up with the same message, “Slow down.”

I’ve been slowing down for five years or more. It makes sense to me on application because I’m teaching the vestry, a Sunday class, and participating in a vestry retreat. They’re starting to respond and when they respond, I tend to overfeed. I gotta slow down, perhaps in my driving, too.

# Part 15 March 5, 2014

These are fill-ins and additions to the story of our trip to Northern Ireland – Belfast, principally. I reviewed my diary which I had kept on that trip. I had written in it every day while there. We were there, I think, for three weeks. I just pulled out a couple of memories from that diary. One of them, which surprised me that I had forgotten, had occurred at the Kensington hotel in Belfast.

We had been having a night time ministry that was really something. We would come in from being at a house or a church or the student center on Queens College campus where the chief minister was Cecil Kerr, the fellow with the broad smile that we met on the street. The reason for his broad smile was that he had recently had a dream in which he saw three Yanks coming down the sidewalk towards him, one of them wearing a clerical collar. Jeff, being an Episcopal minister, was wearing his collar. In his dream, the Lord told Cecil to “listen to them,” so when he saw us he was enthused and very receptive.

We met in lots of homes of politicos and pastors, in several churches, and there on the campus of Queens College in the student chapel. The part that I had forgotten, even though it had been so intense, maybe more intense than anything else, occurred at our hotel. We would come in at maybe 10:30 or 11 o’clock at night from wherever we had been meeting that evening. There would be people waiting for us in the lobby, people who were students from Queens College, ministers or politicos. We often met with them until 2 or 4 o’clock in the morning testifying and teaching the Bible. We prayed for them, and if I haven’t made this point yet, God really set things up all of these things. He really set the whole thing up.

In this diary entry I wrote,

*“Our fellowship has been with all levels of society, both the churched and the un-churched.”*

The people in the hotel; for example, the administration, the lower levels of workers and people in between, would be waiting to talk with us in the evenings. There were national senators, city aldermen, working people, church ministers, and students. I go on from my diary:

*“All have been friendly and many have heard the good news. Some have turned again to the Lord, some have been born again and several are seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It appears at this point that the Church of the Resurrection, which is the Church of Ireland on the Queen’s University campus, and the Reverend Bill Jackson, who is a Presbyterian minister with his church on the “Peace Line,” are the Lord’s choices for the* *renewal and establishment by and in His Spirit. We shall see. The Lord is ever faithful.”*

That was one entry. Another entry quotes,

*“Ministry has opened up on many fronts on these first four days beginning just a couple of hours after we arrived. God’s miraculous guidance has been continually shown, even down to split-second timing. The ministry fronts are: one, to an oppressed lower class; two, to an aimlessly wandering youth; three, a frustrated civil authority; four, to a powerless church; five, to a comfortable middle class including business and professional people. A little deeper look shows them all to have the same problem: a God who is not known to work wondrously and miraculously in personal and corporate* *lives; a God whom, they think, expects mankind to solve its own problems currently through political* *channels and occasionally through more direct force; a God whom [they think] has left man with the ability to care for himself but at the same time left him with an unsolvable problem. The* *common idea is that there is no solution to the Irish problem, but because the Lord sent us here to those in authority and has reminded us that He will bring righteousness and* *salvation to the stout-hearted unrighteous, we can expect Him to fulfill His Word.”*

This is from a letter I had sent back home.

*“There’s a group of eight Queen’s university students baptized in the Holy Spirit since last Friday night. There are two others who have been close so are now much encouraged, two spiritually-open Church of Scotland ministers, and those of the Church of the Resurrection on the Queen’s College campus -- a rapidly growing group of young Christians there who are open and seeking the Lord in an early prayer and sharing time at our hotel room.”*

Yes, in the morning! The bell boy would bring our breakfast to the room and he would stay there while we talked and prayed together.

*“Then there is the Rev. Bill Jackson, a Presbyterian minister who is opening up this week for meetings with us and the elders in his church. Bill himself is almost ready. Jeff is preaching this Thursday and holding a healing service afterwards.”*

Those were fairly early notations about what God was doing.

In Belfast, we had a continual ministry until 2-4 in the morning, *every night* to the hotel staff, college students, Catholic and Protestant ministers, and civic leaders. We stayed three weeks.

I had been thinking about the breakthroughs in our trip to Northern Ireland, the trip to Israel (which we haven’t gotten to yet) and in Mexico. There were breakthroughs in the religious area in each case. In Northern Ireland, the problem was a Catholic-Protestant thing -- very religious. In Mexico, it was the Catholic priests in that village. The ripple on that went very effectively to the local bishop and to the Papal Nuncio to Mexico from the Vatican. On the other trip to Israel, it was a religious breakthrough with an Orthodox Jewish rabbi who already believed that Jesus is the Messiah. He was absolutely orthodox otherwise and he hated Gentiles, but God was chasing him. He came to Houston and spent a few months with us; we, his Gentile church in Houston. He invited us to call him Uncle Moshe, which is “Uncle Moses,” allowing us to use his first name in a warm, family manner.

As I thought about and looked at those trips, they’re just loaded with things that God did day by day, often minute by minute. But the principle thing that I picked out as a mark of God having sent us to those places, was for the breaking down of religious barriers, antagonistic barriers, some that had been there for years, some for hundreds of years. And the Lord raised up leaders in those place; mobile leaders, meaning leaders who could spread the news. He didn’t leave me long in any of those places.

I went to La Concordia, Mexico maybe six or eight times over a few years. I never did go back to Israel, but a couple of people from Israel came to visit us in Texas, one staying for a year and one for a few months. From Northern Ireland only Cecil Kerr, the chaplain on the campus of Queen’s College, came to visit. We heard about other things that happened later but Cecil was the only one from Northern Ireland who visited us.

Of course, from Mexico we had prolonged contact. Some of the people came and lived with us in Texas, some for a year, and one for four years. The way that I saw God work through me in regards to leadership was that, at the Redeemer Church, particular people were being raised up to be evangelists. The Lord had told me, just a couple of weeks after He had baptized me with the Holy Spirit, that I was going to be an evangelist. From my youth I was raised in the Baptist church where the title “evangelist” *really* means something clear and well defined. But when the Lord told me I was going to be an evangelist I had the full knowledge that what He meant was nothing like being a Baptist evangelist. I didn’t know how I was going to be, but it wasn’t to be in the Baptist evangelist pattern.

At the Redeemer, we had a meeting of the evangelists from time to time. None of us were on fire for the Lord in any typical way, but all of us were definitely alive in a certain way spiritually. The Holy Spirit stirred in and through us differently from the pastoral ministries who were alive in a their pastoral way. So when I say “evangelist,” it was just that. The Holy Spirit worked in us in a gifted way wherever we were. The effect was that through us He stirred up faith in Jesus. It could have been faith in Him among people who had been unbelievers or it could have been faith in Him among people who were believers, but their faith was stirred.

In the Fourth Ward Clinic leadership was abundant. We had about 10 different departments in that big supermarket building. There were very effective, very committed Christian leaders who led each department. Comparably, in Sulphur Springs the Lord, in less than a year, raised up three different men into solid spiritual leadership. They all had “flocks” of their own, selected and gathered by the Holy Spirit from among the renewal group. Each flock met weekly on Saturday evening. Each of the three [plus my group] had a house full of people for those meetings. We also had younger elders, the next level of elders who were being developed.

In Mexico, I will just say that the friendly doctor who was already there, who had not been treating people unless they paid him first, and who had his own cash-only pharmacy, just came alive as a doctor and as a Christian. When we weren’t there, we left our equipment with him and he used it. We trained two local young ladies in their late teens, one to be a nurse and one to be a lab technician. He employed those girls in our absence. Equally important, the Catholic clergy in La Concordia started teaching Bible studies.

I’ve mentioned about revival in Northern Ireland. I can’t tell you firsthand about a revival in Belfast except the one I have described on the Queen’s College campus. I can’t tell you about long term results from the ministers we talked to or the long term results in the churches we spoke at. I can’t tell you about any kind of effect that came out of that because I have no first hand follow up. I didn’t follow up personally on any of it. Neither was there personal follow up on Cecil Kerr’s ministry. However, we learned that some time after our visit there in 1971, he had resigned his ministry post at Queen’s College and had opened up a retreat center near the border with the Republic of Ireland. We were told that the center had a significant impact on the spiritual life in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Among all those college kids who were baptized with the Spirit while we were there, and no doubt more later, when they graduated and went back to their home counties and cities they took with them what amounted to the seeds of revival that did spread all across Northern Ireland. A study on the origin of that revival in Northern Ireland was reported in a religious magazine, a copy of which was sent to me about 20 years later. They reported that the revival had begun on Queen’s College campus in 1971.

So that’s kind of an updating on several breakthroughs in long-standing religious problems among God’s people, allowing for an outflow of the Holy Spirit.

To further task myself on not getting prideful, in these testimonies I also look for what may be central ingredients or character points that might be insightful to others. One of them was a genuine, deep humility that had a powerful effect on that orthodox Jewish rabbi in Israel. The Lord changed him, right on the spot in his home. The Catholic pastors in Mexico and those above them in the church had longed for the Catholic-Protestant wall to be torn down [my deduction]. They needed a Protestant’s love in the form of humility, which would not stir their Catholic resistance. Associated with that humility was servant brotherhood because, as we told the Catholic ministers in Mexico after we got to know them really well, we believed God was directing us to bring a clinic to La Concordia. I offered not to come if our being Protestants would cause a problem, and assured them that if they rejected our offer we would tell no one why we were not coming. I also told them that the Lord was going to change the village because of our presence, which did not bother them one bit.

At that point, they considered me to be the answer to their prayers. The servant brotherhood that went from me to them and from them to me just really prevented the flesh being stirred up.

After humility and servant brotherhood, a third point was spiritual order. We told the priests in La Concordia that they were God’s leaders and pastors there and not only would we not interfere with that, we asked them if they would be such over us, too, and correct us any time we needed to be corrected. Wherever we went, we fit into the order that God had already established there.

A fourth central ingredient was that we knew we were called and led to be there by the Holy Spirit, and that He continually led us. Those four character points or whatever they might be called, were marks of spiritual power everywhere we went -- spiritual power without our presenting ourselves as a spiritual powerhouse. It was the power of God to get things done.

Part 16

This is a story of the movement of the Lord’s Spirit in a small group of men gathered in a faithful congregation and being called to go to Israel from Houston, Texas. It shows His faithfulness to Himself and to His Word. I have never been comfortable saying , *“God will be faithful to us.”* That doesn’t sound good to me. It makes us too much the center of eternity and creation. God is faithful to Himself. He is faithful. He will be faithful to what He has said. He’ll be faithful to His Word. So what does God say? It is important to know what He wants because He will be faithful to His Word.

When we think about His being faithful to us, we usually mean He won’t let me have a flat tire, or He won’t let me get sick. He will do all these things that are ME-centered. For one thing, being Me-centered they are not accurate. Also, they are not accurate understandings of what God will or won’t do. It says that we would have perfect physical health, perfect financial health, perfect etc’s if we walked with the Lord. I don’t go for that. So often, it’s exactly the opposite. You are going to have trouble, financial trouble, and health troubles. Many are losing their lives as they walk with the Lord.

I think I have never considered that God would be “faithful to me.” He doesn’t need to do anything to be faithful to me. He is just faithful to Himself, which He is always and that’s fine with me. He can’t be anything but faithful to Himself and His word.

I began to have a growing sense that the Lord wanted me to go to Israel. I don’t remember whether that came out of conversations or otherwise, but it just became a growing sense that I should go to Israel. As usual I brought my buddy Bob West into the conversation and prayers with me. Bob had gone with me on trips before. Then the Lord began telling me why we were going.

We were going to have fellowship with the Jews [in Israel, in this case], and to share our testimony with a particular Israelite there in Israel. The Lord said he was a graduate of the Hebrew University. When He told me that, I went to the encyclopedia to see if there really was a Hebrew University and sure enough, there was. I think it’s the main university in Israel. The Lord said he was a teacher, and that he was looking for a deeper life in the Lord.

Over a period of a couple of weeks, while Bob, Nancy and I prayed and talked about this, asking things like when we should go and how long to stay, Bob had a dream. He said it was during the night but he wasn’t sure if it was a dream or a night-vision. He was so awake in it. He said he saw the face of a man; nothing else of his body, just his face. There were no words from God with it. God did not say, *“This is the man.”* Bob saw only his face. The same happened the next night, also.

When he told me about the dream or vision, we just began to believe that he was the one about whom the Lord had told me those personal things. Now He was showing Bob what he looked like. When we felt that we had gotten everything that God was going to tell us, we did as was our custom in those kinds of situations; we took the matter to our brother elders. We laid it all out in detail and said, as always,

*“If all of you don’t say 100% that we should go, we won’t go.”*

As usual, they had some questions to fill out whatever they wanted to know. And then they all said,

*“Go.”*

Remember that when we went to Mexico, the Lord said, “Don’t use your own money.” He told us He would give us the money and on the morning of our noontime departure, He gave us the exact amount He had told us to take. A bother had called, saying, *“The Lord is telling me to give Bob $275.00. Does he need it?”* He wasn’t even thinking about our trip to Mexico but that was exactly how much we needed to finish out the $300. that He said we were to use, and that He would give us. We already had been given $25.

That was one way the Lord provided financially. I don’t remember between these two trips to Northern Ireland or Israel, but one of those times when we presented the Lord’s instructions to our brother elders the Lord had told me to tell them that they would provide all the money for our trip. We didn’t have any money and they had practically none. That’s “None.” No one had any money. We had money when we were paid on payday, but it promptly went. We had jobs that didn’t pay much because of our callings. Most of us had had jobs that required us to be on the job and on time. But now we had to have greater flexibility and some of our jobs didn’t pay very much. Plus, some people had quit their jobs because God had called them to do a certain ministry that had no or little salary.

That night when we told the elders that the Lord said they were to pay for our trip, they all reached into their purses and pocketbooks, putting the money they had out on the table. One of those was Essie, the lady to whom we had given a nice big house. We had bought the house, had it remodeled, started the monthly payments for a year or so. We had given the house to her family – to her, her husband and their kids. They took up the note.

Now Essie was the main financial support of her household. She was a nurse at a hospital. Her husband had died, and I think that her mother-in-law had also died. Her five kids and 15 or so other little kids, whom she was raising without any other regular financial help, filled up that house. She was given money from time to time by individuals, but her salary as a nurse was the main support of that household.

Essie had been paid that day. When the elders put their money down on the table, Essie endorsed her paycheck and put it on the money stack. When I saw her do that, you can’t imagine how bad I wanted to reject that money from her. Nothing, except the Holy Spirit within me, could have prevented me from rejecting that check, but I knew the Lord wanted me to take it. So I took it. The next day, Essie got two checks in the mail that totaled within a dollar of the amount on her paycheck. That was a Sunday night meeting so that means the checks were already in the mail for her to get them in the Monday morning mail.

God works in everything. There are no accidents. Everything He does is on purpose. We can’t perceive the spirituality or the Lord’s reasoning for everything. We are still too much in our humanity, but everything has meaning and purpose. Everything that happens whether we call it good or bad it’s all for God’s glory and for our eternal betterment.

So we prepared to go. About two weeks before we left, I had a desire to go downtown to meet the Israeli consulate. Every morning I’d wake up and ask the Lord,

*“Is this a good day to go?”* and He just kept bearing witness,

*“No, not today.”*

It got down to one week before time to go. That morning I felt free to go. I called his office. His secretary said he was loaded with appointments that day and couldn’t see me. I asked her politely if she would see if he could work me in just a few minutes between his appointments. He said he would. I got there, waited a bit, and was ushered into his office. Mr. Simon Bonet, the Israeli Consul, seated me in a nice chair. He went around to the other side of his large desk and sat in his swivel chair. We started talking. He asked,

*“So, you’re going to my country?”*

“Yes, sir. Another person and I are going.”

*“Why are you going?”*

“We are going there to share our Christian testimony with one of your countrymen.”

He took that into consideration. I didn’t know at that point that missionary work in Israel, Christian or otherwise, was and is against their law. I told him the truth. I would have told him the truth even if I knew it was illegal to do missionary work there.

*“You’re going as a missionary then?”*

I knew I wasn’t going as a “missionary” the way missionary was ordinarily defined.

“We’re not going as a typical-type missionary. We are going because God has told us about a person, a countryman of yours. He has showed us what he looks like, has told us things about him, and we are going over to see him. God will put us together with him and we will share our testimony.”

*“Oh.”*

At that point he was swiveling back and forth and rubbing his hands together. His head was down. He was saying,

*“The most presumptuous man I have ever met! The most presumptuous man I have ever met!” The most presumptuous man I have ever met!”*

The third time he said that, it dawned on me that he was talking about me.

I said, “Mr. Bonet, am I the first person you have ever met, either Christian or Jew, who has a conversational relationship with the Lord?”

He was still twisting his hands while swiveling in his chair. He said,

*“Yes, you are! Yes, you are!”*

That really thrilled me because he had just confessed that he believed what this Christian was saying. I began sharing short vignettes about God saying something to me or to someone else like Nancy -- to do or not do something. We’d do it or not do it according to God’s word and things would happen. Great things would happen.

I probably testified for 20 or 30 minutes. He was wrapped up in it. He said*,*

*“I wish I’d have known you were coming before now because I would like to have arranged some appointments for you with some people in the government.”*

Remember that God had told us we were to go to share our testimonies with Israelis, especially with one man. Mr. Bonet was just the first person. After he mentioned that it was too late for him to arrange appointments with leaders in the government I was tempted for a few seconds to feel like I should have come to see Mr. Bonet sooner; in fact I said silently,

“Lord did I miss not coming down here earlier?”

But then I felt assured that things were right on course.

*“Since I can’t arrange government interviews with you, I’ll give you some names of friends of mine for you to see.”*

It didn’t take much insight to realize that this was a really opened door, because since he was in the government, his friends would be open, too. He gave me three names and their contact information. He said,

*“These people, particularly this one, are of a kindred spirit with you.”*

That’s pretty good for someone that you might be tempted to think has any spiritual awareness. This non-Christian, Jewish man perceived that his friend had a kindred spirit with me. He might not have been thinking about God’s Spirit, but he might have been using the word “spirit” loosely. He then said,

*“In fact, this one is here right now in Houston with one of his children. He is an American.”*

I think he added “missionary” but he said,

*“He is a hero because during our war with the Arabs, this man was very important to the Israeli artillery. He has a color vision problem, an abnormality whereby he could look at camouflage placements and, to him, they weren’t camouflaged. With his visual defect, he could see where all the camouflaged placements were. He spotted them for the Israeli artillery and the artillery would wipe out the placements. He was a hero with the Israeli army without being an Israelite or being in the army.”*

His name was Wendell [sp.?] Jones. Mr. Bonet even knew Wendell’s Houston phone at the medical center. I contacted him. We talked for awhile, enjoying brotherly friendship. He gave me more names of friends in Israel

*“I’m not going to be over there, but here are some names.”*

So, Bob and I left on our mission. We landed in Tel Aviv, Israel’s national airport and checked into a hotel in preparation for going to Jerusalem the next day. We thought the best way to be led into contact with the object of our trip was to go to Jerusalem, then just expose ourselves to him and the Lord. Soon after we had checked into the hotel I got busy making calls to people on the list that we had received from our two Houston contacts.

I called another who was supposed to be a kindred spirit to me. His name was Jack Jaffe, a Christian Jew. He was in Jerusalem and we were in Tel Aviv. I asked him if we could get together with him and he said,

*“Sure, stay right there. I’ll be there in a couple of days.”*

“Oh, no, we’re headed for Jerusalem. We’ll see you there where you are.”

*“I’m coming to Tel Aviv in a couple of days. Just stay right there.”*

I have been exercised a bit by the Lord to recognize His working when somebody steps entirely out of reason in their relationship to us and says something like that to us. “Okay, Lord, we’ll do it.” In fact, in Northern Ireland, one local had kept pushing us to see the Botanical Gardens. *“You need to see the Botanical Gardens!”* Finally I had heard the Lord say, *“You need to see the Botanical Gardens.”* In this case, I needed to stay in Tel Aviv until Jack came to us in a couple of days.

We stayed, strolling about town. I remember that I’d had, without formalizing my thoughts about modern day Israel, that Israelites would be people like King David and the other mighty men, righteous people. But Israel was worse than the United States in public carnality.

We waited for Jack. Two nights later there was a knock on our hotel room door. I opened it. Before I could say anything to the man standing there, Bob whispered, behind me,

*“That’s him!”*

I knew what he meant. That was the guy he’d seen in his dream.

We invited Jack Jaffe into our room, completed our greetings and, of course, the first thing he asked was,

*“What are you doing here in my country?”*

We told him about himself and that it was the Lord who had told us about him. We told him the desires of his heart which he had not known. Before the evening was over, he knew those desires.

The next day we headed for Jerusalem. We spent most of three weeks meeting his friends -- Arab friends, Jewish friends and Christian friends, Christian-Jewish friends and Christian-Arab friends. Jack was well contacted. He wasn’t a John Wayne type, not in a position of leadership, but just a regular guy.

And he was a teacher and a graduate of the Hebrew University. There was one particular thing that we heard from his friends. Whenever he would introduce us to one of his friends, commonly they would ask,

*“What have you done to Jack? He’s a different guy!”*

We didn’t know how Jack was before, but that night in the hotel room he had become a different guy. I think he was a little bit of a wishy-washy, unsure, maybe a little wimpish type of person. I think that’s how he had been. He had been a nice guy. But now he was also a man of confidence and zeal.

We got to meet a lot of the people. I asked him about one of the people who was on Wendell Jones’ short, a name that he had given me back in Houston. He had given us the name of a rabbi, saying,.

*“This is an orthodox Jewish rabbi who believes that Jesus is Messiah.”*

“Oh, I want to see that man!”

*“He’ll spit on you. As soon as he finds out that you are a Gentile, he will spit on you. He won’t have anything to do with you.”*

“I love him! I’ll love him. He’s my kind of guy.”

That rabbi was a man who knew what he stood for. He knew what he believed and in whom he believed. His life was an expression of his personal commitment to the Lord Jesus, including spitting on Gentiles.

Jack knew of him, so he arranged for us to go to his house. I don’t know if he told him that we were Gentiles, but he arranged an appointment. When we got there, his wife greeted us. No one else was around. She seated us in the living room, where we sat for 20 or 30 minutes. I felt like we were being made to cool our heels, by the rabbi and by the Lord. That’s a real technique, you know, when you are wanting to elevate yourself over another person. In order to do that, you need to put someone else down. Making them wait on you is a common technique. *Just make them wait on you.* I remember thinking that of the rabbi and of the Lord. It fit them both, the rabbi to humble us under him and the Lord to humble us under Him and the rabbi.

Finally, we were ushered into his library. One long wall was solid with books, not even a window. There were three of us, Jack, Bob and me. He invited us to sit on the couch opposite the books. He started talking. He talked and he talked. He said some not-so-polite things about Gentiles and Gentile life, gentilism, and the Christian church in general. He didn’t say those things during our entire visit, but he talked and monopolized all of our time. Silently, I kept asking for and depending on the Lord to give an opening. He just didn’t give an opening, so finally, after we had been there for maybe a half hour, he stood up. The meeting was over.

Jack said good-bye and Bob said good-bye. I don’t remember if there was any handshaking or not. But I walked up to him and said,

“Rabbi, may I say good-bye to you the way we say good-bye in our church back in Houston?”

*“Sure!”*

I put my arms around him in a full embrace. I knew I had to GRAB him and hold him, but in holding him I was loving him. I loved him. Love flowed out of me all over him. I didn’t have any idea how he would receive it. You never know when you love somebody how their response will be. They may crucify you or spit on you. You don’t know. But I loved him.

We left. Two days later the rabbi called Jack and asked if we would come back to see him again.

So we went back. This time we didn’t have to cool our heels. His wife took us right into his library and he invited us to sit down. He opened up the conversation by saying,

*“Tell me about your church.”*

All he knew about our church had come from a hug. Just a physical act of a hug that had a spiritual impact that was *real*. Tell me about your church. I spent all the time I could telling him about our church, our relationship together, and our relationship to the Lord, the joyful, sacrificial lives of God’s people asking little or nothing in return from the Lord – receiving a little but adequate “stuff” but a lot of the Lord Himself in return.

He didn’t interrupt me. When I was through talking, he was facing that wall of books with no windows, with his back to me at that point. He appeared to be looking out into the hills far away, or into eternity. His was that long look that’s looking at nothing but a picture in his mind. Then he said,

*“I would like to see God’s people living together like that someday before I die.”*

So you *know* what I said!

“Come and *see*. Come be with us. Come spend as much time as you can.”

And he did, just a few months later. He came over and spent about three months. He stayed with Lad, one of the five elders.

At this point, Nancy told a story about his first view as he walked up to a gathering where everyone was eating in their back yard. First he made sure that the beans contained no bacon or ham. Then he told us his first view was that we didn’t look like Christians -- haircuts, make up, shorts, blue jeans; we didn’t look like a godly group to him. Later, as he got to know the people, he said he recognized that indeed they were Christians.

Another thing about him was that he would hear a Bible reading or teaching in our church and would say, “That’s NOT what it says.” His primary occupation was to translate the Bible for persons and schools all over the world, so he knew the original languages. It was fascinating to hear him explain Scripture to us. We would ask,

“What translation can we get that’s the best?”

*“None of them! English can’t say it.”*

One of his corrections had to do with Elijah being fed by the ravens. He told us that the word wasn’t ravens, but Arabs. It was a bigger miracle than ravens feeding Elijah because it was a Jew being fed by Arabs. It was a slang term to call an Arab a “raven.”

He spent three months among us at the church living at the house of one of the main elders, having open, loving fellowship. We would speak of “Moses” but because his name was Moshe [Moses] we called him “Uncle Moshe.” That blessed man humbled himself among us to allow us to call him uncle, Uncle Moshe.

Jack Jaffe spent a year with us. I didn’t maintain contact with Uncle Moshe after he returned to Israel, and very little with Jack Jaffe over the next five to ten years. My point there is that when the Lord would do those things, at least through me, usually He wouldn’t prolong my ministry with them. He would make His impact, then remove me from them. I used to wonder about that but I have stopped wondering. It could have been that I was neglectful.

There was no way I could be a full time doctor in the clinic, which was a powerful, spiritual ministry to the medical world, to patients, and to churches, and do all those other kinds of ministries, plus maintain them.

Nancy shared again at this point that she had visited Jack Jaffe after that in Jerusalem. “Mother took me to Israel with her on a Billy Graham Crusade trip. I contacted Jack and he took me to a Christmas party at a friend’s. There were Christians, Jews, Arabs, and all kinds of people having a Christmas party together, having a wonderful time. We talked and talked, talked and talked. We spent the afternoon with one American missionary couple who still stay in communication with us. Jack was still in broad fellowship in Israel.

(Bob) I made only one trip to Israel. I’m not a world traveler; I work, and I don’t take vacations, but I am available to the Lord for wherever He sends me.

The first three years we lived in Houston, before I started the Fourth Ward Clinic, I was in that group of doctors in a clinic, four of them and me, neat the Port’s Turning Basin and docks in Harrisburg, a section of Houston. We had lots of foreign sailors who needed immunizations to be administered on their ships or, if they were sick, they were brought to the clinic to be treated or perhaps hospitalized by us. We had a little hospital that was our second floor. If it was a condition that needed more intense care we would put them in our hospital.

The men were merchant seamen on merchant ships from all nations. They would come through Houston as only one of their many ports of call. Many would come through several times per year. On one occasion, a seaman on an Israeli merchant ship injured his back. I saw that he needed surgery and referred him to a neurosurgeon, who operated on his back. The usual practice with foreign seamen was that when they were well enough they would be put on a commercial plane and sent to a port where they would make contact with their ship. This seaman, Samuel, and I had gotten pretty close by the time he was ready to return to his ship. He was 15-20 years older than me, and I asked him if he would like to stay with me and my family. The ship was coming back through in about two weeks and he said that he would like to. Our plan received approval from the shipping company that was responsible financially for him, and we had to get U. S. government approval for him, his being a foreign person in our country. That was all done pretty easily. The shipping company agreed because it wouldn’t cost them anything.

We dismissed Samuel from the hospital and took him home with us. Our household was composed of all males, plus Nancy. We had a fairly young baby, our fifth son, Benjamin, but we had mostly high school and college aged guys. I think there were about 21 of us in the household at that point. There were no females except Nancy, Although a young adult lady from the church came over every day to help with the housework as a part of her recovery and rehabilitation in the Lord. It was a very lively, happy household.

Samuel was a Jew and not a Christian, and hardly exposed to any Christianity in his life. One day I asked him if he would like to meet our pastor, and he said “Yes.” He had seen him in church. He had traveled around the world enough that his English was good. He had been born and raised somewhere like the Ukraine before he immigrated to Israel in his young adulthood.

I took him to meet Graham at the rectory. Graham asked him if he believed in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. He said, no, he didn’t know much about Jesus. Graham opened up *The Suffering Servant* passage in Isaiah 58 about the Lord being so badly mistreated, and read to him about the Suffering Servant. When he got through reading, Samuel had tears in his eyes and said,

*“That Jesus I know.”*

The Jews, according to Paul and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, have a covering over their eyes. They can’t “see” when they read the Scriptures. They can’t see Jesus in the Scriptures. Samuel had it lifted from his eyes. He saw Jesus. “That Jesus I know.” Boom; that was it.

We stayed in contact with Samuel. In fact, he came to visit us in Athens, Texas after he retired from the Israeli Merchant Services. He was a good guy and is surely home with the Lord by now. We have a photograph of him. He was the Yul Brynner type with a bald head and moustache, and was very muscular.

That’s my Israel story that is not a part of the Israel trip.

I have another Merchant Marine story that is Chinese. This one was a Chinese nationalist shi, not Chinese Communist. Chang was a fairly low-level seaman on that ship. He became ill. I don’t remember what his problem was but we admitted him to our hospital. When he was ready to be dismissed from the hospital, his ship had already gone from port, but was coming back. God is so good at that. He has no difficulty scheduling ships in port. The Lord would give a chosen seaman some sort of bodily problem, would get him off at Port Houston, put us together, heal his physical problem, give him eternal life, return the ship, and put him back on it. Those ships were on God’s schedule, as is all else in His creation.

I went through the same process and easily got permission for Chang to stay with us. He couldn’t speak any English but that was no problem. He was a good friendly guy and so were we. Sailors are accustomed to being around foreign languages and compensating for not knowing the language. You can get by really well without knowing the language. So, when he was staying with us while waiting for the ship to come back to port, we took him across Houston to a Chinese-American church where we had gotten some of our early spiritual upbringing just a few years before. There they spoke great Chinese. They ministered the Gospel to him and he was born again.

Of course, we came home with a born again Chinese seaman and we still couldn’t talk with him! But those Chinese-Americans also gave Chang a Chinese Bible. That was a great help from that day on. When we took him to his ship, he made plans for our whole household to come back to his ship for a lunch. That was such a grand thing for our household of boys because they were accustomed to casual meals and only at home. We had plenty of food but never as much as they would have liked [boys seem to have hollow legs to fill at and between meals] and certainly not much of the spiced up, tasty food like they were about to experience.

We went out, the whole household of us. They had a big table put together in the mess, and they served us a table full of food. I told the boys I wasn’t sure, but maybe this table full was all we were going to get. It would certainly have been plenty for a meal for all of us, but it might be just the first course. We ate pretty heartily. They took that away and then they brought the next course. They took that away and brought another course. I think they brought seven or so courses. Some were not big amounts of food, but none of us had ever eaten like that before. They really fed us “high on the hog,” so to speak. Even pickled green eggs! Everyone enjoyed the food except Nancy who was 8 ½ months pregnant and she couldn’t eat very much.

(Nancy) It was a very humble place. I remember the seats were wood planks. The tables were planks, all scrubbed and nicely painted. They were very gracious and very simple – good examples for us.

So I have told my Houston stories, my Israel stories, my China story and my Mexico story. It will be really nice some day to see more of the ripples. There have to be ripples, good and bad but always ripples. That’s why it was neat hearing what happened on the Queen’s College campus -- that the same year we were there, revival broke out.

While we lived in Sulphur Springs, Texas for three years, and then in Athens, Texas for 31 years we had lots of people coming over from Scotland. Most of them were in the medical field. It had started when a Scottish medical student had contact with one of the Church of the Redeemer’s traveling ministries. He was told of our medical ministry so sought and received permission to do part of his medical studies with me. That led to a succession of medical students, medical and radiological technicians, a pastor and his family, his mother-in-law, college students, one college professor, and a common laborer young man [graciously sent by the others]. One daughter of the pastor became so enthused medically and spiritually that she became a doctor. That makes sense, because I have always told young people that they should look about at the different types of persons who are doctors and say to themselves, “If he can do it, so can I.” I am an encourager to many who do not think they can make it.

Several have made additional trips back for fellowship, and we have visited them. One has immigrated and lives in the Texas Hill Country about half of the time. He goes back over to Scotland to work, then comes back to Pipe Creek for a few months of retirement with his American wife. He had been the first one to come over as a student. He started the whole thing. The next year another student came, then every year for a few years just one came. Then they came in groups or families. Then someone had said*,*

*“Oh, I wish our pastor could come over and see what the Lord was doing in that church.”*

Bob said, “Ask your pastor to come over,” and he did.

The common laborer was about 20 years old. He could never have afforded to travel anywhere. The group who had been coming got enough money together and sent him over. He spent a couple of months with us, and worked at one of the brother’s dairies in Sulphur Springs when he needed something to do. We had lots of people from Scotland who came over. I went over twice and Nancy and I went together once.

Our life, fellowship and ministry in Sulphur Springs was a powerful and special time for us. That which the Lord did and did not do in those few years is for another time.

THE END