From Uplook, 2005

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A New Beginning? (January-February 2005)

From Uplook, January-February 2005. Editorial.

“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months…” (Ex. 12:2).

It wasn’t, of course. The beginning of months, I mean. The nation of Israel would have a calendar year quite unlike ours. Our New Year follows the pagan celebration of the rebirth of the sun. Instead, the Jews to this day have a civil year much like our “school year,” beginning in September with Rosh Hashanah, the Blowing of Trumpets. Eventually when they would enter the Land, the Israelites’ field crops would be planted then, in the autumn, and harvested in the spring, beginning with the barley harvest.

This statement in Exodus 12 comes, then, in the middle of the year—at the beginning of the seventh month, Abib. But these words of the Lord came not only at the end of the drab winter and at the first signs of spring; they came at the end of more than four centuries of oppression, since Ishmael began to mock the son of the free woman (the only way I can see a period of 400 years until the Exodus, Gen. 15:13; Acts 7:6).

Our Lord is the Lord of beginnings. “In the beginning (or, in beginning) God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). But there were beginnings before that beginning: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God” (Jn. 1:1-2). In fact, our Lord declares, “I am…the beginning…, saith the Lord,

which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Rev. 1:8).

And our Lord is also the Lord of beginning again! When the first creation lay in ruins, its masters now chained and enslaved by the rebel king, God proposed a new beginning: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1). It was to be a fresh start so miraculous, so stupendous, that it would make the Heir of all things poor in the process. Yet by it, humanity could hope again. It would be said of all who laid claim to His offer: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17). Oh, the freshness, the liberty, the song-filled heart of the newly freed slave who steps into this "beginning of months" and joins the redeemed ones' chorus: "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation" (Ex. 15:2).

However, for the children of Israel, this first deliverance over their enemies would hardly be the last. That wonderful exodus from Egypt was only the first beginning of many needed beginnings again. And so it is with us. We love to sing, "From victory unto victory, His army shall He lead," but the conquest is not one uninterrupted triumph. We at times find ourselves—whether individually or as local assemblies—desperately in need of a chance to begin again. We stand alone in the darkness with Jacob at the fords of Jabbok, or sit beside Nehemiah and grieve when we hear that the Lord's people "are in great affliction and reproach" (1:3). Sometimes we even lie with David on the palace floor, fasting and mourning at our personal folly and sin, wondering if there is any hope for us again.

Or like Peter, we have fled His sorrowful gaze and now weep in bitterness of soul.

Yet we know there must be hope for us, because we know how these stories ended—every one of them with dramatic new beginnings! Yet such fresh starts are not automatic. As in type that first Passover night, there must be a new beginning of obedience to God's Word, a new grasp of the deadly consequences of unforgiven sin, a new appreciation of the value of the blood applied personally, and a return to that simple trust that feeds on the Lamb to gain strength for the journey Home. If so, this could be for you, for me, "the beginning of months," of a fresh start with the Lord. Will it be?

The Tsunami and a Loving God (January-February 2005)

From Uplook, January-February 2005. Article.

THE RECENT TSUNAMI brought with it a tidal wave of people questioning the God of the Bible. In one form or other these were the words on a million lips: How could a God of love allow a wave to sweep away thousands and leave millions more to mourn in the wreckage of their shattered lives? Death and destruction daily sweep across the lives of millions. Ten thousand children a day die of starvation in India. AIDS is wiping out a whole generation in Africa. Genocide decimates country after country. But when a horrific event like the recent tsunami hits—complete with graphic video footage—we all feel especially vulnerable and seek answers to the seemingly random tragedies of life. Is Someone at the controls? Or is this planet plunging through space, careening from one senseless calamity to another? Is it a flight of folly, without purpose? There are things we don't know and we shouldn't try to bluff our way through. We are not God and do not understand many of His ways with men. Better to sit and mourn in silence with this world's Jobs than to say hurtful (and often untrue) things, as his "miserable comforters" tried to do. One of the most encouraging truths to be gained from the book of Job is that God does not remain silent during times of tragedy. We can be sure He is speaking directly to untold millions at this very moment. Let us pray that the world may listen and respond to His compassionate and convincing words to their hearts. But there are some very important things we do know. We know that,

whatever the seeming evidence to the contrary, God is a God of love: “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love…” (1 Jn 4:16). Not only do the words of Scripture declare it, but the death of the Lord Jesus proved it (Jn. 3:16). And, even though personal catastrophes strike all of us, our experience also affirms His loving care. We who believe the Bible know as well that no person has a life independent of God. He gives it in His grace, one breath at a time. As Jeremiah surveyed the wreckage of Jerusalem through his tears, he exclaimed: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” (Lam. 3:22). We were “born in sin” so every day given to us is completely undeserved. Every time we sin we bring upon ourselves a sentence of immediate death. Thus every moment we live is by grace alone. We know that God is not alone in the spirit world. Though sovereign, He has allowed a measure of freedom of action to His creatures. These creatures include a super-human spirit, “which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). Both the Hebrew Abaddon and the Greek Apolluon mean “Destroyer.” What we see around us is the wreckage of a massive civil war which shall rage until God makes the Lamb’s enemies “the footstool of His feet.” It is God’s intention to banish sin, sorrow and suffering from the universe entirely, but He has something He must do first. We know that God is presently engaged in a massive rescue operation in this world. Sometimes, like a lifeguard, He must use violent means to bring those who would struggle against Him to the point when they finally give up. Remember that He is not seeking those who naturally trust Him and willingly rest in His arms.

He is seeking to save those at enmity with Him. He must disarm them first and leave them no other hope but He Himself. Some day millions (perhaps billions) will thank God for war, cancer, prison—yes, and this tsunami—because it was the very circumstance He used to bring them to Himself. Such times as these call the people of God to be ready to pray, especially for the believers strategically located on the ground. We should be ready to witness to the overarching plan and love of God. But we also should be ready to practically help: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Subsequent pages will show you how.

The Day of Small Things (January-February 2005)

From Uplook, January-February 2005. Article.

Is this verse a refuge for times when we have a paltry harvest?

Recently I was discussing gospel farming with another believer. He told me of an incident some time before when he was discussing the same topic with my father. This brother had posed the question: “If the Lord said, ‘Look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest’ (Jn. 4:35), why do we have such little results?”

The simple but sage reply: “Perhaps we aren’t working in the fields.”

But many North American Christians find such an obvious answer too unnerving. Instead they look for some biblical reason. No, His arm is not shortened, His ear is not heavy. Yet some dare to suggest that the day of grace is pretty well over for this continent—that God has somehow withdrawn His Spirit from North America. Or perhaps hearts here are too hard and the seed can no longer penetrate. Yet the mighty harvest at Pentecost was in the very city where they had recently crucified the Son of God! Are we saying that our lands are more difficult than Muslim or Communist countries? Is the Word of God no longer alive and powerful? Of course God can save people like Saul of Tarsus and Nebuchadnezzar, but our neighbors are just too tough! I hardly think so.

When all else fails, Zechariah 4:10 is called as a witness (a very reluctant witness, I should think). It's first line reads: "For who hath despised the day of small things?" We are told that this implies there are days in the history of the world when we gather only small results, and at such times we should not despise such paltry returns.

But what is the context of this query? Zechariah in his first six chapters is recounting eight visions he had one night. These visions are an overview of the climax of the age. The section that includes the "day of small things" quotation is describing the darkest night in human history. During this time, "Tribulation the Great One," God will nevertheless have two witnesses shining for Him. They are called "two anointed ones" (v. 14) or "sons of oil" (margin). And they are portrayed for us in a most ingenious way.

Two olive trees are growing. Not unusual, perhaps, except that they are flourishing in the dark! Well, not exactly—the olive trees produce olive oil from its berries. And the oil travels through golden tubes into a menorah which burns brightly in the darkness. It is the closest thing you will ever see to a perpetual motion machine.

Not a sound is heard, but the trees grow and the light shines. Then the silence is broken by an angel. "Do you know what these are?" he asks. Zechariah needs help. The answer is well-known to us: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (v. 6). In other words, this is the simple but highly effective way the Lord will turn the tragedy of the Tribulation days into a breathtaking triumph! With only two witnesses!

Almost 2500 years later, an elder in heaven asks John a question for which he also needs help. John had seen “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues…before the throne” (Rev. 7:9). Who are they, and from where did they come? You know, sir, John replies. Do you know?

They are the two witnesses’ harvest! The day of small things isn’t a day of small results but of small resources. Let’s discard our excuses and double our efforts. Let’s work harder, pray more fervently, and expect greater things from God. Oh, and let’s make sure we’re actually laboring in the fields!

That Certain Sound (March 2005)

From Uplook, March 2005. Editorial.

Does anyone play trumpet these days?

I am not known for my musical expertise, but one thing I do know: the beauty of the trumpet is its ability to play single notes well. In spite of all the sophisticated communications equipment available, the trumpet has been used by the military to efficiently and effectively send clear and simple messages directly to the troops. When urgency is a life or death matter, it's no time for the trumpeter to try out his trills. Or as Paul writes: "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8).

He was writing to the Corinthian church about their fascination with tongues speaking, and pointed out to them that the purpose of communication was, well, to communicate! What good was it—when lives hung in the balance—to make sounds that were unintelligible? We should be certain about the notes to be played and then play them certainly. Anything else leads to confusion or something worse.

Failing to raise the alarm can be fatal. The Lord laid this principle out through His servant Ezekiel: "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them,…his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. 33:6). Is there no enemy to be fought in our day? Is there no watchman on the wall? Is there no trumpet to be blown? "Is there not a cause?"

After the lengthy preparatory notes given to the Jews before they entered Canaan, God gave one final set of instructions, and it had to do with trumpet playing: “If ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets…that they may be to you for a memorial before your God” (Num. 10:9-10).

The silver trumpets, made from the redemption money, were to be blown by the priests. Yes, it was priestly work then—and still is—to call God’s people, both for assembling together and for going out unitedly to war.

In recent years, there has been a blowing of trumpets in North America to call the saints together at the “beginning of your months” for conferences. These have been both days of “gladness” and “solemn days.” Most who are familiar with these times would agree that much good has been done and that the Lord has brought in blessing to the Lord’s people, both individually and corporately.

But it should be noted well that the silver trumpets were not only to be used to call the Lord’s people to assembly. The question remains: who among us will give the trumpet blast, in no uncertain terms, to call the Lord’s people to a concerted and sustained gospel offensive? Who will call the saints to war?

This is a day of mealy-mouthed equivocation and chaotic confusion in the camp of Christendom. Some seek a path of compromise with the phoenix-like Babylonian

complex. Others pour their energies into trying to salvage a condemned world system through political activism. Yet others busy themselves with building religious empires, energized by best sellers and bottom-line successes. With soldiers running this way and that, distracted by their own agendas, is it any wonder that the enemy is dominating the field in the countries of the West?

The battle is generally going badly for the Church in North America and Western Europe. Yet we thank God for some fearless fighters who, Jonathan-like, say to their armorbearer, “Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6). Valiantly Jonathan’s armorbearer replied, “Do all that is in thine heart…behold, I am with thee according to thy heart” (1 Sam. 14:7). And, as the story goes, when the Philistine thugs saw the brave duo below them, they hurled down the challenge: “Come up to us, and we will show you a thing” (v. 12).

It was Jonathan and his young compatriot, however, that showed the Philistines a thing or two. Up they went, with the armorbearer strangely enough following Jonathan. Aren’t assembly leaders to simply rally the troops from a safe place, surrounded by the people? “Come up after me,” cries Jonathan, confident that “the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel” (v. 12). Oh, for elders like that today who will shout, “Come after me!”

The commentary adds that, like the work done by oxen yoked together, the two Israelites—a prince and a

commoner—plowed the mountain-top half acre for God. But that was by no means the end of the battle; it was only the beginning. Such terror took hold of the Philistine hordes that, from a vantage point several miles away, Saul's watchmen gaped incredulously as the uncircumcised "multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another" (v. 16)! In the same way, I firmly believe, our God could turn the tide of battle today.

Let Saul play king at his make-believe court under a tree at Gibeah; let Israel's erstwhile soldiers "hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits" (13:6) or feel suddenly called to take an extended vacation in the land of Gilead. As long as Jonathan had his trusty friend—and the Lord—they would not while away their afternoons drinking tea and discussing the deplorable state of things. To say the least, with his sword in hand, Jonathan certainly made his point, one still heard today by any serious believers.

Young men and women, before you strap on your weapons and head out to prove God in the high places of the field, a word of warning. Read the rest of the story again, in case you have forgotten. Here it is, in brief.

When Saul hears the tumult of the battle, he lifts his head in wonder, in fear. Who has gone missing from the camp of idlers? Who dares to stir up the bees' nest and taste the sweet and strengthening honey of victory? Who would defy the king's example of resolute inaction? Who would take such initiative to fight the foe without a general consensus of the inert mass gathered about Saul? It was his son, a man from the next generation!

The king now compounds his error by commanding the people not to enjoy the spoils of war, not to strengthen themselves for the ongoing battle. And so “the people were very faint” (14:31). What folly! Yet those who wish to head out to battle today must take this message to heart. It will not only be the Philistines you will need to face; there will also be those who ought to encourage and help us who will actually stand in our way. The only harsh words ever recorded from Jonathan’s lips come at this moment: “My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if perhaps the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?” (vv. 29-30). Withholding resources from the soldiers of Christ in the time of battle will not go unnoticed by our Commander-in-chief.

In conclusion, permit me to humbly issue a two-fold challenge:

• To those who have lingered long enough, waiting for a call to arms: Look to God alone for your encouragement, your equipping, and your victory. Let Him lead you against the foe. Don’t worry about numbers. Find a kindred spirit or two to take with you. And with sword well in hand, go show the enemy a thing!

• To those who have hesitated to call a generation of spiritual young people to united battle: We face a strong and determined foe. He uses ruthless tactics and relentless pressure while we pick and fuss over trivialities. The enemy spares no expense while we often try to nickel and dime our way to victory. From this day

forward, like another generation in another cause, may we declare that “with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge…our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor” to advance instead the cause of the once-crucified Christ “while it is called Today.”

Something Blocking Your Vision? (May-June 2005)

From Uplook, May-June 2005. Editorial.

It isn't just Highland cattle that have let down their hair.

I'm 'way too comfy. If you looked at the stuff I've gathered around me, you could easily get the impression that I was planning on being here for ever. As a friend in Ireland facetiously said while we toured some recent renovations on his property, "Signs of our pilgrimage everywhere!"

Is there any indication from our lifestyle that most North American evangelicals still believe in the soon return of Christ? Some pilgrim tents we have! Of course it isn't the size of the house we live in that is the issue. George Müller had a really big place—and filled it with two thousand orphans! Lord Radstock, although he sold off things that provided personal comfort, kept his estate—and used it to lead scores of Europe's crowned heads to Christ. Robert Cleaver Chapman had TWO houses! Of course he used them for the overflow of guests who came from all over to learn at his "university of love." Thank God for all believers with hearts as big as their houses, who use everything they have for the advancement of the Great Cause.

But I fear that my life is badly overstocked. People in the retail business are always looking for ways to shorten the turn-around time of things sitting on their shelves. And I need to get thinking that way, too. Abraham's example humbles me. He was a very rich man. If he had over 300 servants able to wield swords, it would not be

unreasonable to estimate his household to exceed 1000—imagine his grocery bill! The Lord told him that all he beheld was his. Yet he deliberately chose a tent as an appropriate dwelling place all his life. And why? "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:9-10). He felt his lifestyle should be appropriate to his belief that everything he had down here was temporary.

At a recent gathering of pioneer preachers (see the report on page 5), someone commented that it will be difficult to uproot the present generation of good young couples so they can be available for pioneering new assemblies. Not because they won't move geographically—they are highly mobile—but because of the warm embrace of the so-called American dream, the reasonably comfy North American Christian lifestyle.

Then there was a pause in the conversation. And a look of well-deserved embarrassment as one preacher gulped out, "I guess they learned it from us."

I guess they did. Again, it isn't the kind of car you drive or where you take your holidays; these are superficial things that can't be a true measure of devotedness vs. worldliness. The problem is deeper than that. We often misunderstand Paul's disappointment with his fellow-worker, Demas. It is a misquotation to say he loved this present evil world. There is no indication that Demas was doing anything other than going to have some meetings! Here is how the passage reads: "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and

is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia" (2 Tim. 4:10). As far as I can see, these three men were all going on preaching campaigns. The difference with Demas seems to have been an unwillingness to bear Paul's hardships. It was the present he loved rather than living for eternity.

If preachers like me are—consciously or unconsciously—protecting ourselves from roughing it, we can hardly be convincing when we speak to others about putting our all on the altar. Who are we convincing? Not many, it seems. How different from the gospel pioneers who were used by God to establish many of our local assemblies in North America. As veteran Donald Ross used to say, they could always use more help from some real workers who were prepared to "break up the prairie and be content with bed, board, and washing."

Without mentioning financial struggles, primitive transportation and lodgings, poor meals, loneliness and long absence from families, Alexander Marshall (renowned as the author of the much-blessed gospel booklet, God's Way of Salvation) in a letter dated October 11, 1882, wrote:

"Labourers are beset by difficulties and trials on every hand. Breaking up fresh ground is not easy, but it is delightful work. Those who are called to this service need much courage, faith, and patience. They must also be willing to 'endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,' and count on being misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned. Into whatever town, hamlet, or village they enter, they are met by the cry, 'Why come here? There are plenty of churches and ministers.'

“It cannot be questioned that there are many ‘churches’ and ‘ministers’ in Canada and in the States; but, alas, amidst the profession that abounds few there are, comparatively speaking, who can give ‘a reason of the hope that is within them.’ Whenever the gospel is told out in freshness, simplicity, and power, the cry is raised ‘Heresy! heresy!’ One minister where I laboured for a considerable time declared that ‘simply believing on the Lord Jesus might do for the days of the apostles, but would not do now.’

“When evangelists go to districts, and preach in halls or schoolhouses, taking with them an open Bible, teaching the young converts what God has taught them, they are accused of being ‘breakers up of the churches’ and ‘sowers of division,’ and the people are warned to beware of them. More labourers are much needed. There is a wide and open door all throughout Canada and the States for the preaching of the gospel. There is much land to be possessed. Young men who have a heart for God and souls, and who are fitted for preaching the gospel, would find a splendid field for service
“ (Evangelist and Pioneer, pp. 52-53)

That’s away out of my comfort zone! But I wonder: have we been looking for painless preaching, opposition-proof opportunities, and easy evangelism? I’m not the I-love-to-rough-it kind. But I am increasingly feeling that Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 are more of a job description for evangelists than an exotic piece of church history. I often feel like the Church of England prelate who quipped: “Wherever Paul went, there was a revolution; wherever I go, they serve tea.” Are we expecting that we can somehow disconnect the linkage in these thrilling words: “A great door and effectual is

opened unto me—and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9)?

NOTE: The following scenes are of a graphic nature; if squeamish, you may wish to stop reading now.

I'm not exactly sure what I'm expecting will happen, or what it will cost if we are going to see this generation do more than maintain existing assemblies at the status quo. I have the feeling that if we are going to really obey the word of Christ to "Go ye (put your name in, if you dare)…" I think it means "For Sale" signs in front of some of our houses, perhaps lost equity because we choose to buy in depressed real estate markets for the sake of the gospel, downsizing and belt-tightening, purposeful job demotions, leaving Grandma and Grandpa for the other side of the continent (or maybe Grandpa and Grandma leaving to do the Master's bidding in their retirement years), and who knows what else. Whatever the particulars, it means some of us will have to die (1 Jn. 3:16).

Is it possible (I know this is daring) that large assemblies—you know who you are—will think about seeking the Lord's face in thrusting out those He wants to be breaking new ground? Is it possible that young people—unless called by God to go to college—will consider choosing tent-making trades that allow them to pay their way while evangelizing new areas? Is it possible that prayer meetings will spring up with young couples—encouraged by their elders—meeting to pray for major cities in the Deep South, the Far West, Quebec and all across the land; to pray for the pioneers already in the North American field, and to cry to Him, Lord of the vineyard, to thrust out some of them? Is it possible

that the Little Rock experiment—begun seven long years ago—will no longer be the exception but the rule? Is it possible…?

What Happened to April? (May-June 2005)

From Uplook, May-June 2005. Article.

Observant readers of this magazine will note that the whole month of April has gone missing. Time is short as it is, and no doubt you take it personally when someone absconds with a whole month! What happened?

It has been some time since the editorial team of Uplook has been pared down to a staff of one. This makes it well nigh impossible to keep the magazines coming on schedule, especially since the editor is regularly AWOL, visiting the Lord's people hither and yon. What with a family to raise and the need for at least 3-5 hours of sleep a night, it seems that I'm late with the next issue before the last one is at the press.

It becomes especially difficult when special events call for a major investment of time. This occurred in the illusionary month of April. It was decided by the board of Uplook Ministries that a gathering of some pioneer workers should be held for a week for the following pressing reasons:

1. We hardly knew who were out there in the extremities of the North American fields. How could we pray for them, support them, or inform the saints about them if we didn't even know who they were, let alone what their needs were? We needed to get to know our pioneers.

2. We believed that these isolated workers—both husbands and wives—had quite lonely existences, and needed to spend time with others who shared a similar

burden. We knew the saints who had invested in our ministry would want us to provide them with agreeable accommodations and a restful and beneficial time. To this end the lovely facilities at Gull Lake Bible Conference, near Kalamazoo, MI, were secured for the last week in April. Although some who were invited were regrettably unable to attend, about 80 workers gathered.

3. We felt that many workers were giving their best but not seeing as much blessing as their labors warranted. Perhaps we all had some pieces to the puzzle, but none had them all. Would it help to gather for a Pioneer Workers' Round Table, sharing lessons learned to help others? We thought so. And it proved to be true.

We include some expressions of appreciation from the workers who attended, because in a general sense everyone who did without their April Uplook had a part in the week (since I used my editorial time to prepare for the conference); in a more particular way, many of you invested financially in our ongoing conference ministry.

Matters for earnest intercession

Obviously this conference was only one step in seeking to regain the gospel offensive, but, by the grace of God, I believe it was a significant step in the right direction. Would you pray fervently with these exercised servants of the Lord for the following:

1. The possibility of a general conference for those interested in pioneer gospel work—young couples burdened about the unreached areas of the continent. It would be hoped that the Lord would use such a

conference to enlarge vision, link people with a common burden for fields of service, provide helpful tools to use in the gospel and discipling, and spur the immediate advancement of troops into battle.

2. The possibility of a meeting of those interested in preparing fresh and effective gospel materials for the 21st century. Tracts written by Moody and Spurgeon served their generation, but handing out a drab and poorly designed gospel leaflet about a missionary on a train in China during the Boxer Rebellion communicates irrelevance to the recipient.

3. Encouraging teams of young men to invest a year, post-high school, in practical field training in the gospel. This time could be beneficially spent in visiting smaller assemblies who could use more gospel outreach and in working alongside a variety of seasoned evangelists and Bible teachers (more to come on this).

I'm sure you can add your own longings to this prayer list for North America. But the time is now to begin unitedly storming the ramparts of the enemy again, rather than occasional brief and solo swordplay. We will seek to keep you posted on developments in this column, as well as beginning next month, DV, with introductions to some pioneer works and workers in North America.

One final matter for your prayers

We are inviting several brethren to help us in the preparation of the magazine so that the issues will be more regular, and so that I may give more energy to this deep burden to see the spread of New Testament assemblies across the continent. Announcements are

coming. Thank you for your grace during these transition months.

How Many, For Starters? (May-June 2005)

From Uplook, May-June 2005. Article.

The work is great and the laborers are few. Who will join the front lines?

God must do everything that will be of eternal value. “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:7).

However, although He can speak through asses, and even rocks if need be, generally the Lord uses people to be the agents of His work, equipped and energized by His Spirit. And the man who wrote those words in 1 Corinthians very much appreciated his fellow-workers, as he called them.

Paul no doubt saw the wisdom of the Lord’s example in taking the twelve “that they should be with Him and that He might send them forth” (Mk. 3:14), and so did similarly. It was not simply a Paul & Timothy duo: there was Titus, Mark, Luke, Barnabas, Demas, Trophemus, Tertius, Silas, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus…

Are you sitting down?

It is lovely to see an older saint working with and training a younger disciple. But starting with one and ending with one when the teacher passes on—that isn’t good arithmetic. The world population multiplies. We need the multiplication of our forces as well. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many

witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

I've been praying that the Lord of the harvest will thrust out at least 500 couples into the North American hinterland in the next year or two. Am I being too timid in only asking for a thousand people? Probably. When the Lord began harvesting from Jerusalem, He began with well nigh ten times that number! And consider that the whole world's population estimated at the time of Christ's birth was less than that of North America today.

But a thousand committed workers is a start, though nothing compared to the thousands of Mormons and JWs that are constantly looking for the unwary. On May 14 of last year, UPI announced that "the consecration of a Mormon temple in New York on June 13 will be a milestone in one of the most extraordinary religious developments of our time—the breathtaking growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The rather stark six-storey building opposite the Metropolitan Opera is the 119th LDS temple; four years ago there were only 50. This increase is paralleled by the construction of 400 new meetinghouses worldwide every year."

New Muslim mosques and Hindu temples are springing up around us. Shall we continue living as we are, offering only an occasional sigh at the alarming statistics?

Considering one thousand pioneers for North America shouldn't frighten us; it should inspire our prayers. Hudson Taylor died in China exactly 100 years ago. In the days approaching the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the century, financial resources were very slim. But the

need of the field before him drove Taylor to what some call audacious faith—asking for 1,000 new workers when the funds for the support of the Mission had dwindled almost to nothing. He wrote to a friend: “We have twenty-seven cents…and all the promises of God.” More than enough! (See True Story, p. 25 for more faith-building incidents from Hudson Taylor’s life).

The right ones for the job

Not anyone will do for this rigorous task, of course (see the previous article by A. E. Horton). Woe betides elders that “commend” their problem cases to some other area! The ones whom the Lord calls could well be the most expensive ones for an assembly to give away.

It may take some months for these workers to be able to leave their assembly for other parts. Usually they should train others to fill the ranks before they go, if some are not already available to step in. After all, if they cannot train replacements, they are not some of those evangelists, pastors and teachers mentioned in Ephesians 4, who can mature the saints to do “the work of the ministry” (v. 12).

Sometimes—at great sacrifice—the Lord may call on newly planted or small assemblies to give up a promising young servant, the way Timothy was released from the area of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium (see Acts 14 and 16). Generally, however, it does not seem to be wise for a small, group to be expected to give up the bulk of its future workers to other areas of the field, leaving it to struggle on.

Of course there is always the temptation for an eager young man to look further afield when he believes his

own local assembly is “perishing” because the leaders have “no vision” (Prov. 29:18). He is eager to lay his life down, but not for a cause that he believes is already lost.

What would the wise among us say to a young man like this? Never leave such a place? I can only say that he should spend serious time in the presence of the One who moves in the midst of the gold lampstands to be sure that his directions are from the Head and not from his heart. God can still use a young Samuel to rescue a seemingly impossible situation when his ear is open to the Lord’s voice, and—as is often the case—when godly, praying women compensate for the failure of weak male leadership.

The path of greater blessing

In most cases it would be the norm, wouldn’t it, that the healthy assemblies should be willing and eager to invest some of their capable, consecrated (and often under-utilized) believers in a work further afield. It should not be thought, however, that the larger an assembly, the more it can contribute. I am living proof that there is an optimum size for a body. Once that size is reached, it would be nice if increased growth meant spare kidneys or a back-up heart. But no, all that happens is increasing bulk and increasing lethargy.

It should also be noted that the idea of what is a suitable size varies dramatically around the world. This perception has certainly been affected by the megachurch phenomenon here in North America. But did you know that evangelical local churches on this continent still only average 50—that’s right, 50 members.

According to pollster George Barna, megachurches—those with 1000 attendees on a typical weekend—only represent 1% “of the Protestant church landscape.” These rapidly growing and high-profile congregations, though we thank God for every one saved through their ministries, are not winning the battle of taking North America for Christ. According to Barna, from 1992 to 1999, average church attendance has dropped by 12% in the US whereas the population has increased by 9%.

Far better to have many smaller groups where each one has a significant part to play rather than having great crowds of spectators with only a few who have vital roles.

A good number of North American assemblies, it seems to me, have an excess of qualified people who have little exercise because there is little opportunity. Young people, loaded with energy, therefore pour themselves into careers rather than the work of reaching eternal souls. As Paul would explain (Phil. 1:14), some gifted brethren are reticent to take public part when older and more developed ministers of the Word are available. Obviously having more frequent opportunities to exercise their gift should not require the imprisonment of senior men, as in Paul’s case!

Give generously!

How many gifted men should these healthy assemblies be expected to release? One indication is given by the assembly at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Five percent? Ten percent? The Holy Spirit requested no less than 40% of their preaching gift, as far as we are told—two men out of five. What’s more, the two happened to be Paul and Barnabas. How could they afford to give them up? How

could they afford not to when the Spirit moved them? And how much poorer the whole church would have been if these elders stood in the way of their larger sphere of ministry?

I believe that the same principle regarding personal enrichment is also true of local churches. I am enriched only when I learn to give. Here is the path of blessing. Any assembly that becomes parochial, inward looking, interested only in what benefits them, is on the path to spiritual poverty. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Paul pled with Corinth to follow the example of their poor brothers in Macedonia: “We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor. 8:1-2, NKJV). Their hearts, not their wallets, overflowed.

Note that these Macedonians provided for Paul’s needs, not when he was ministering to them, but when he was pioneering elsewhere. This is something else that must change. Many assemblies are happy to send money to workers on foreign fields (which we applaud) and give to preachers who occupy their platforms. We must, however, take significant steps to invest in pioneer works and workers in North America. For those that have been richly blessed by God, may we hear the ancient plea as if from these isolated servants and fledgling assemblies: “Think on me when it shall be well with thee…” (Gen. 40:14).

The Field at Your Door (May-June 2005)

From Uplook, May-June 2005. Article.

Farming usually works best on a farm.

On a recent trip to the Markham assembly in the Toronto. ON, area, I had occasion to discuss the present situation with a brother there. He told me of a conversation he had with my father.

“I asked him, If the fields are white to harvest, why are we seeing so few saved?”

“Perhaps,” my father replied, “we’re not in the fields.” Busy at gaining further education, establishing careers, maintaining existing assemblies, securing comfortable retirements—all considered to be legitimate pursuits—who is actually in the fields?

During the last quarter of the 19th Century, North America was seen as a ripe mission field. Between 1871 and 1880, six intrepid young men from Scotland—later joined by UK, German, Dutch, Italian and other European evangelists—came to our shores. They pitched tents, rented halls, shouted out the gospel from street corners, and wore out untold pairs of shoes going from door to door. They held conferences, started magazines, and built assembly buildings with their own hands. In one generation they saw the establishment of more than 500 New Testament assemblies in North America.

We honor their memory. In 1881, Donald Ross’ magazine, The Barley Cake, listed 33 pioneer

evangelists in North America. How many do you know of today?

Following the Second World War, many of our best young men and women (who had seen the worldwide need while in the military) left these shores to plant the gospel banner in foreign lands.

But others saw the ongoing need on this continent, and also were uprooted to push the frontier of assembly life across Canada and the United States. Oliver Smith in Iowa. The McEwans, Lester Wilson, Welcome Detweiler, W. G. Smith, Harold Mackay and Herman Luhm in Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Gordon Reager in Atlanta. T. B. Gilbert. Harold Harper. John Spreeman, Noah Gratton and others in Quebec. The list is substantial. As the first wave of pioneers had worked in the industrialized Northeast, Chicago and the West Coast, so this wave reached into the Midsouth and the Midwest.

But then something happened. The next generation put considerably larger percentages of their time and resources into new church buildings and enlarging assembly numbers. Slowly but surely, gospel pioneering withered away, and what evangelists were left began frequenting already established assemblies—often to do the gospel work that should have been done by the local assemblies.

At the same time, we saw in many places (due, we said, to increased distractions in society) a diminishing of attendance at gospel meetings. Gospel Halls plodded on with regular Sunday evening gospel meetings and special series, seeing a few saved, mostly Christians' children. Chapels tried a Sunday morning Family Bible

Hour, but in spite of seeing some neighbors attend, the trend has been to drift away from gospel preaching to teaching Christians.

Whatever the reasons, though we rejoice at some bright exceptions, in most areas of NA the gospel offensive has almost ground to a halt. Some preach the gospel, largely to Christians; others have abandoned gospel preaching almost entirely. It is high time for that to change.

Though we're thankful for every soul saved (each worth more than the whole world), we will not fulfill the Great Commission if assemblies of 50 or more are only seeing a few saved each year. Obviously if, on average, each believer saw only one person saved each year, the number of assembly believers should double each year.

That means everyone should be trained to evangelize, encouraged to do so, and we are praying specifically for one another in this venture. Every believer should have a prayer list of those they want to see saved ASAP, and we should expect God to answer these prayers.

But even this is not enough. Assuming there are 100,000 believers in assembly fellowships across the continent, doubling this number will hardly put a dent in the project. Just the increase in the Canadian population exceeds 150,000 per year; the US number is ten times that.

We must not only think about personal evangelism and public preaching at the local level. There must also be broadcasting of the seed. We need more well-designed, accessible, accurate, non-technical and attractive gospel web sites. What about satellite radio? Local cable TV programs? Gospel CDs or DVDs for mass distribution? What about blogcasts?

The massive need, the encroaching darkness, and the distracted and lethargic church in North America leaves the field almost wide open for us. The marvels of modern technology, the power of the unchanging gospel, the vast resources of heaven, and the convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit are all in place. What is needed? Men and women willing and ready to stake their everything on the ironclad promise of God: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6).

9 Suggestions for Potential Pioneers

1. Get a map of North America on your wall and begin praying for various needy areas of the continent. Pray for others who are becoming exercised for North America as a mission field. Pray that the Lord will thrust out the right ones at the right time.

2. Look for someone you can train to take your place in the assembly so you’ll be freer to move.

3. Clear up debt, simplify life, get rid of the clutter, free up time for the better things.

4. Communicate with some pioneer workers for their invigoration and to have a more informed prayer life. Tell them some encouraging things.

5. As you are able, invest prayerfully, financially and generously in North American pioneer evangelism.

6. Ask the believers to pray with you about the possibility that the Lord may be calling you to be involved in breaking ground elsewhere.

7. Look for opportunities to hone your skills in prayer, evangelism, Bible study, preaching, hospitality, or in whatever way the Spirit has gifted you.

8. Take vacation time and arrange a visit to a pioneer field in North America to "spy out the land" and/or learn on the job what the work there is like.

9. Watch (and pray) for a conference of exercised believers with pioneer hearts, asking the Holy Spirit to do a work in linking those with a common vision but with varied and complementary gifts, to work together in some new field. Oh, and did I say pray?

7 Benefits of Living the Safe Life

1. You'll never be asked to write one of those testimonials on "How The Lord Miraculously Helped Us When It Seemed There Was No Way Out."

2. You'll likely always have lots of reserves and will never have to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

3. Your life will be relatively calm, measured, and predictable, without those shocking moments when you experience the remarkable intervention of heaven. You will have effectively insulated yourself from that.

4. You will have your evenings and weekends free for yourself, never bothered by people seeking spiritual help, as they do from those daily cast on God.

5. You will be able to stock away substantial investments, often to be left to unsaved relatives. Large sums of money give you something to regularly think over, plan for, and worry about. This is the alternate policy of living "for a rainy day" rather than living for "that Day" (see 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:8).

6. You will be able to exert control on many decisions of your life, unlike servants who are often imposed upon, interrupted at unearthly hours, and expected to give selflessly of themselves.

7. You will be remembered as a Christian with a good job, a well-kept garden, a nice car, a fine wardrobe, and huge untapped potential.

That’s Great! (July 2005)

From Uplook, July 2005. Editorial.

With such tremendous need, little blessings just won’t do it.

It wouldn’t have looked like much to a casual glance. Twelve men (one had gone out into the dark) had been gathered for a simple meal. Eleven of them seemed uncertain, perhaps frightened by the dramatic turn of events. After three years of field training under His inspiring example and masterly teaching, they had heard their Leader just announce that He was going away. They had seen Him do things that not only amazed the crowds who observed them; people are still talking about what He did! Now, on this momentous evening, He has a few remaining lessons to pass on to them. No need to be afraid, He said. Trust Me (Jn. 14:1) just as you have trusted God, My Father. We’re all headed home to the Father’s House, and I’m going on ahead to prepare the way. You can be sure that if I go away, I’ll return at just the right time for the rest of you. I want you to be with Me forever. Then, after answering a few questions from His flabbergasted followers, the Master said this:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to

My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (Jn. 14:10-13, NKJV).

And then, just in case they (and we) might miss the impact of the final statement, He added: “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (v. 14). What did it all mean to them in the 1st century…and to us in the 21st?

Greater Works Than These?

I suggest that it means this: the Father and Son had worked together during Christ’s incarnation, and the miracles He did were evidence that the Father was in the Son doing those works. But more, the project was not over. Christ was the foundation to a continuing series of great works that would be done through people like Peter and John, and you and me, if we believe Him (note: the believer will do the works). In fact—could it be true?—the works done by His church would actually be greater than the miracles which He had done!

Obviously the great work before us will not be accomplished by chronic doubters, idle critics, nay-sayers, crepe-hangers or quitters and their ilk—unless they are willing to be converted! Such words as our Saviour speaks can only be embraced by those souls who believe that God is still on the throne, the Spirit is still actively at work in North America, Christ is still building His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

When invited to another round of debates on the wisdom and feasibility of rebuilding Jerusalem—and won’t some people be offended if you do?—Nehemiah responded, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.

Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Neh. 6:3). Right on, Nehemiah.

Is it true that God's people can do greater works than the Saviour's miracles? Of course the works done by the people of God through the 20 centuries since have been greater numerically. They have been greater ethnically and geographically, too. Jesus' works were done basically in one small country to a few Middle Eastern tribes. But more than that—and surely this is the Master's meaning—the nature of the works would be greater. He had, on occasion, provided physical bread for hungry stomachs; we have the honor of dispensing life-giving bread for hungry souls. The blind received their sight at His touch; we sit by a sin-darkened person with an open Bible. At last we hear them exclaim, "I see it!" and heavenly light floods into their minds. Christ spoke the word that brought Lazarus from his tomb, but we watch with amazement as those "dead in trespasses" receive life from above, becoming alive forever before our eyes. (I'm trying to control my use of the ! key.)

Ask Anything in His Name, and He Will Do It!

Behind the Lord's words that night there is another vital truth. How did He do His works? He says, "The Father who dwells in Me does the works." And so it would be with all who would do the "greater works" of which He spoke. It would be God working in and through His people that would produce such works. So we read of the early believers: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them…" (Mk. 16:20).

The book of Acts begins to record some of the greater works done in the early day of the church. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the

resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (4:33). "And great fear came upon all the church…" (5:11). "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (6:7). "…And at that time there was a great persecution against the church…" (8:1). "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed" (11:21). "…a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (14:1). "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (15:3). It seems that everything was great in those days—great power and grace, great reverence and persecution, great blessing and joy. Isn't that great!

So here we are 2000 years later. Has the human need changed? Has the power of the gospel changed? Has God changed? Has the Saviour's promise—If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"—changed? No, they are still all great. Then what has changed—and needs to be changed back in a hurry? I would suggest it may be the persons who stare back at us in the mirror each morning. Here are some test questions to ask ourselves:

1. Do I believe that the gospel is the greatest power in the world, greater than anything the enemy has?

2. Am I asking for some great things in Christ's name, confident that He will do them?

3. Is one of those great things a request each day that the Lord would use me to point someone to Christ?

4. Do I think it strange that God is "calling" so many young Christians into high-paying professions and so

few into some great work for Him as pioneer evangelists, foreign-field missionaries and the like?

5. Do I expect the Lord to come any day, and want to be found doing great things for Him at that moment?

What is our motivation for change, for getting out of our recliners or neglecting our gardens or doing something better than another week in suspended animation at the cottage? Why should we be trying fresh ways to get out the gospel, or laying down our lives for the brethren, causing ourselves major discomfort in the process? Apart from the fact that souls are exiting time for eternity at the rate of 153,000 per day, let the Lord Jesus answer the question: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn. 14:13). That’s one really great reason, don’t you think?

Thrust Out (July 2005)

From Uplook, July 2005. Article.

It looks like He means business about this!

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, where He Himself would come. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest” (Lk. 10:1-2).

These words are arresting for a number of reasons. The phrase “after these things” pushes our thinking back to the previous events found in chapter 9. The Lord Jesus, using a divine “time machine,” had hurled Peter, James and John thousands of years into the future. They had seen the Master in His kingdom glory as He had prophesied in verse 27: “But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.”

How crucial to daily pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” While we understand the biblical distinctions between the Church and the kingdom, we must not forget we have a role in the kingdom. We have been “delivered…from the power of darkness, and…translated into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Yet at present the kingdom on earth is in mystery form. We await with joy the Saviour’s taking of His kingly rights on earth.

However Peter exhorts us to give “all diligence” to use the Christian’s calculator. We must add to our faith:

virtue + knowledge + self-control + perseverance + godliness + brotherly kindness + love" (2 Pet. 1:5-7). In this way "an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

Notice as well in Luke 10 that the Lord had increased the number of His front-line troops seven-fold (many manuscripts read "seventy and two others"). So to the twelve commissioned in 9:1, He now sends out 70 or 72 more. This is good strategic thinking. They were to be advanced teams going "before His face into every city and place, where He Himself would come." In this way, He could reap where they had sown. He said as much to the twelve at Samaria:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors (Jn. 4:35-38).

So Jesus thought not only that working individually was not the best; He also thought that teams of reapers should follow hard on the path of teams of sowers. Can we learn something here? This is, after all, the Master plan.

But even multiplying His ministry through the ministry of the twelve, and then multiplying the twelve—until there were seven times that many—was not enough. We

have been called on to ask for even more help from the Lord of the harvest.

How much help should we be asking for? The Lord Jesus didn't say exactly, but He gave two clues. The number of workers would be affected by the number of laborers already working, which He said were "few," and by the size of the project, which He said was "great." Notice it is laborers He needs, taken from a word that simply means "someone who gets things done." Talkers we have aplenty, conference preachers, etc. We need some workers out there.

Finally notice the graphic word the Lord uses for the process of getting people out into the field. It is the word ekballo, to hurl or thrust out. It is also translated "expel," "drive," and "pluck." One dictionary gives its meaning as "to lead one forth or away somewhere with a force which he cannot resist." Hmmm! Are those of us whom the Lord wants to use as laborers so attached to family, career, personal agendas, or whatever that He will have to expel us from our family circles, pluck us out of our jobs, drive us from our own plans, and thus hurl us into His work?

Ever-Bearing Varieties (July 2005)

From Uplook, July 2005. Article.

Thinking about being fruitful in the senior years.

I'm not a young man anymore. According to the stats, two-thirds of my life is gone. And as we are aware, life doesn't always work according to statistics. But I do know that three of my four grandparents were in heaven well before their 75th birthdays. This is not maudlin speculation. The Scripture encourages us to "number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Assuming I do have 21 years left (uninterrupted by the Rapture), and I keep relatively good health in body and mind, here are what they look like:

Sleep (at 8 hrs/night) 7 yrs

Dressing/washing, etc (1+ hr/day) 1 years

Food prep/consumption (3+ hrs/day) 3 yrs

Work (8 hrs/5 days; retire at 65) 3 yrs

Subtotal 14 yrs

I say "subtotal" because this list does not include many legitimate activities. Note that these "years" are composed of 24-hour days. So the work hours are 3 years x 24 x 365.25 = 26,298 hrs. That also means that spending on average an hour each day watching television over the 12 years = one full year of your life gone! A half-hour commute each morning and evening must be used for good somehow—prayer, meditation, etc.—because it soon adds up to a whole year of living. Now if I have ten or even fifteen productive summers

left, I must consider how each one will count most for the Lord. Time is a non-renewable resource.

Personality types make a difference, no doubt, but as our lives progress past middle age and beyond, we feel the onset of hardening of the attitudes. Our energy supply, once thought to be limitless, now must be more carefully rationed. Risks once taken as an integral part of living in an uncertain world, begin to look reckless. We can, if we're not careful, become a bit cynical, jaundiced with life. The concrete begins to harden.

When we were children, we assumed we could be anything we imagined. Cowboys. Sports stars. Inventors. Or the President. Now reality has settled in. When young we labored under several delusions. We thought we were immortal, that we could do most anything. We thought we were "better than [our] fathers" (1 Ki. 19:4). But we have discovered—hopefully not too late to make a difference—that we have our limitations and liabilities. So there is no time to waste and we must strain every nerve to make any significant progress.

My oldest grandson B. J. and I were talking recently. He's always designing, constructing things out of any handy household item. I suggested he would make a fine architect or engineer some day.

"No, Grandpa," he replied in all seriousness. "I'm afraid not. I'll be working at another job."

"Oh, what's that?" I inquired.

Deadpan, he explained, "I'm going to be a super hero."

Not many super hero openings these days. But as amazing as it seems, the Lord can use ordinary people—

even those of us who feel our best days are slipping by—to still accomplish super human tasks. As Paul writes:

God has chosen the…weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty…and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Cor. 1:27-29, NKJV).

These verses encourage us all to realize that the vigor of consecrated youth can be used by the Lord, but is not required in order for Him to accomplish His purposes through us. So these days as I approach the mid-50s, I'm asking the question: How can I "still bear fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:14)? How can I ensure that the refresh rate of my soul keeps me bright and hopeful and vigorous, Caleb-like, right to the finish line?

We all probably know some sweet and invigorating seniors. They still have a lilt in their voices, if not in their step. The sparkle in their eyes is a reflection of the hopes and dreams still in their hearts—hopes and dreams that have survived the betrayal of friends, the rigors of the battle, and the disappointments that have come to other hopes once held dear. What are their secrets?

MAKE NEW FRIENDS: Nothing like old friends, we say. But they have one obvious liability—they keep leaving for The Other Side! Besides, the familiarity which we enjoy with old friends is the very thing that slows down spiritual circulation. Like it or not, the world is changing. We need a constant flow of new ideas, innovative ministries, creative ways of accomplishing the Commission. We need the input of younger minds and hearts or we will find ourselves irrelevant to life as

it is. There is a place for looking through the archives, but if we don't avail ourselves of young men's visions, we'll be left with nothing but old men dreaming.

KEEP LEARNING FROM THE WORD: There is a serious danger that we come to a place in life where we feel we know enough. Enough to speak intelligently at the Bible reading or answer a young believer's question. Enough to sound eloquent at the Lord's Supper. Enough to lead a soul to Christ. Enough momentum to cruise into the kingdom in neutral.

However "they that wait upon the Lord" are the ones who have a constant appetite for the things of God. Rejuvenation comes through a fresh diet. The Lord "satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103:5). Manna rotted if it was kept over, and there's something musty and unhealthy about a faith that adds nothing new. Clichéd worship or witness betrays a petrifying soul, and neither the Lord nor the seeking soul will find it palatable. It may be that the mind isn't what it once was, but the spirit remains as effective a receptor of truth as it ever was. We need the attitude of hungry "babes" to have the Father's revelation come to us in continual freshness (Lk. 10:21).

One way to keep spiritually spry is to use a Bible unmarked by old notes. Instead of rethinking and discovering fresh treasures in a passage, I know my eyes lazily drift to notations long ago recorded. Ah, that's it; no need to think again! Another help is to ask for and listen to young believers' discoveries in the Book. The bare-faced fact is this: I learn nothing new when I do all the talking.

TRAVEL SOME: I don't mean a Caribbean cruise or a look at the Sistine Chapel. If circumstances allow, I have seen great benefit come to seniors who leave their cocoon-like world to visit isolated saints or small assemblies. It isn't only the eyes of the body that lose their acuity with advancing years. Our souls also may lose their ability to see beyond ME and MINE. Worse, tunnel vision can make us think that only our way and view is right.

I'm not suggesting that fundamental truths should be discarded or compromised to adapt to world trends. Of course not. But hopefully we would see how foolish it is, after a visit to the Amazon, to impose a Royal Ascot dress code on new believers as an evidence of spirituality, or expect such of desperately poor believers in India or from our inner cities. And we would see through the "KJV was good enough for Paul…" mentality if we spent time with translators who are battling through a Bible version heretofore unwritten.

Better than that, we would find new avenues to help and encourage others. We could bring home thrilling stories of the Lord's work in other places. And perhaps we would allow others in our absence to try their wings and begin to prepare for the day—barring the Rapture—when we will not be there.

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT: Not a new hair-do. I mean the sort of things Paul might suggest:

i) Forgive someone: Not because they deserve it, but "as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). There is nothing like it to restore the smile, lift the burden, or enlarge the soul. None of this "I'll go part

way and see if they respond in kind." That isn't how God did it, and neither should we.

ii) Be an encourager: Take a young person out for lunch. Just the two of you. No criticism this time, just encouragement. Ask them how you can pray for them. Get them a good book. It may well be a turning point.

iii) Rejoice and be thankful: Wrinkles go very nicely with a smile. Try to limit the aches-and-pains talk. Drop the negative stuff. Call a friend and tell them you appreciate them. Life is gloomy enough, so spread sunshine. Few people are accused of being too happy.

Fruitfulness in old age is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Two influences will keep us from it—suckers and deadwood. Suckers may be the healthiest looking part of the plant, but they never bear fruit. The sucker attitude takes but never gives; anything that calls for "me first" must submit to the Husbandman's pruning knife.

As for deadwood, it has the form of a life once fruitful, but no longer bears fruit. It also must be pruned if we are going to have more than mere form.

"We…desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10). Let's keep going, and growing, all the way Home.

A War of Words (August 2005)

From Uplook, August 2005. Editorial.

The tongue, harnessed to the Word of God, is a weapon unequalled in the field.

“And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword” (Lev. 26:7-8).

“Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places” (Deut. 33:29).

Edward R. Murrow (1908–1965), renowned World War II broadcaster, said of Winston Churchill: “He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle…”1 Few would question the stirring influence of the statesman’s words in rallying the British Empire as it stood virtually alone in the darkest days of the war.

Since the night that Peter pulled his sword in Gethsemane, the most shameful chapters in the history of the Church have been those when the supposed followers of Christ have forgotten what their true weapons are. “If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight…” (Jn. 18:36), said our Lord. He did not mean, of course, that Christians were not soldiers engaged in a battle. What He did mean was that the war we fight is spiritual. “We wrestle not against

flesh and blood, but against…spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

What good, then, would broadswords be against spirit beings? "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). This panoply—the strengthening influence of truth, the encompassing influence of righteousness, the preparatory influence of the gospel, the adaptive influence of faith, able to quickly move in any direction and in any situation, and the selective influence of salvation (not isolation), allowing some things in but blocking others to protect our minds—all this is defensive weaponry, that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day" (see Eph. 6:13-17). How we need such protection in these perilous times!

But there is one weapon more. It is not, like the others, defensive. This one—the sword of the Spirit—is designed to be pulled from its scabbard and skillfully used to put the enemy to flight. How shall we learn to use it effectively? Our Commander is the master swordsman. In fact, the concluding portraits given of Him in Scripture present Him as "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges" (Rev. 2:12; see also 1:16; 19:15). No need to guess what the two-edged sword represents. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). In fact the One who bears this sword "is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:13).

Christian swordsmen need to get used to the heft of their weapon, and to its incisive action—"even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12). The darkened soul can keep people from Christ: the mind

says, “I don’t understand it”; the heart says, “I don’t feel it”; the will says, “I don’t want it.” But the right use of the sword can free the spirit to rise to God in faith, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

We must not wait for swordsmanship lessons until the enemy comes over the hill. Have confidence now in the power of the Word. Memorize it and meditate on it today. Talk about it with other believers, asking what they have found helpful in their witness. Then go into the day depending on the Spirit, whose sword it is, to bring just the right scripture to mind as you need it. A sword in the scabbard has never yet put an enemy to flight. Better than Churchill, let’s mobilize the Word of God and send it into battle.

1 Broadcast Nov. 30, 1954, quoted in In Search of Light (1967) p. 276

What We Must Leave Behind & What We May Take With Us (August 2005)

From Uplook, August 2005. Bible study.

What We Must Leave Behind

“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” 1 Timothy 6:7

1. Material Possessions: The verse in the masthead is found in the context of a warning passage about living for the wrong world. It includes the following red flags:

a) confusing gain and godliness brings soul bankruptcy (v. 5)

b) wanting to be rich administers self-inflicted wounds (v. 9)

c) loving money spawns all other evils (v. 10)

d) being rich tends to pride and false trust (v. 17)

But Paul concludes with what appears to be a contradiction of verse 7. Timothy is to remind the rich “That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:18-19). See page 17. See also Peter’s question in light of this (2 Pet. 3:11-12). Wise people live in the present but not for the present.

2. Our Humiliation in these Bodies: “…We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even

to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:21). Our bodies:

a) were created by God for His glory (Gen. 1:27)

b) were damaged by the Fall and by subsequent sin

c) are presently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)

d) have been redeemed by Christ (1 Cor. 6:20)

e) will be transformed at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:42-54)

3. Our Sinful Nature: There are some things only the Rapture will fix. BUT IT WILL FIX THEM. The world's glitter will look like carnival prizes the morning after, compared with heaven's glories. He will not be ashamed to be called our God! (see Heb. 11:16). We shall be like Him (1 Jn. 3:2). How will it happen? What does it mean?

a) we will be removed from all sinful influences

b) we will see everything from God's perspective

c) we will see the horrific consequences of sin

d) we will see our Savior—His eyes, His wounds, His love

4. Opportunities to Witness: Who will you witness to in heaven? "He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). The Lord Jesus will be "…preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world," (1 Tim. 3:16) or not at all.

If you wait to witness until: a) you feel like witnessing; or b) you think you have all the answers; or c) you know just the right way to do it…there will be nobody then to tell! There are only believers in heaven (Rev. 21:8).

5. The Ability to Make Sacrifices for Christ: What will you be able to sacrifice in a land where you own

everything? We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). There is a day coming called “the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). All things promised to us now will then be our possessions. At the present time, with our limited resources, we can give in the spirit of the widow with her two mites (Lk. 21:3). We should give:

a) first ourselves (2 Cor. 8:5)

b) cheerfully—spontaneously (2 Cor. 9:7)

c) regularly (1 Cor. 16:2)

d) generously (2 Cor. 8:7; 9:6)

e) proportionately (2 Cor. 8:12; 9:15)

6. Suffering for the Saviour’s Sake: The Rapture will herald an end to the long and bloody history of the Church on earth—although there will yet be suffering saints during the Tribulation. The rejection and persecution of believers will be over. First the suffering, then the glory is a principle throughout Scripture. That means, of course, that our time is limited to identify with our Lord Jesus in the day of His rejection.

There are no baptistries in heaven, no pillories, no prisons, no cruel jokes or ostracizing. The Bible is clear: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12). As Amy Carmichael wrote: “We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only a few short years to win them.”

7. All Harmful Effects of the Fall: “…for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

a) no more disease, pain or death (Rev. 21:4)

b) no more sorrow or crying (Rev. 21:4)

c) end of loneliness, weakness, failure and sin

c) end of war, famine, natural disasters

d) no more night, darkness, wasted time

e) end of separation from fellow believers—"no more sea"

f) no more disappointment or unfulfilled desires

g) no more regrets, fears or doubts

h) no satanic temptation or worldly allurements

Do you want to go to heaven? What is in heaven will be wonderful, of course. But thank the Lord for what isn't there, as well as what is there.

"Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave with regret? There are better things ahead than any we leave behind." —C. S. Lewis

What We May Take With Us

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14

1. Our Beings as Possessors of Eternal Life: Whatever else will be in heaven, perhaps the most amazing is that WE will be there! As noted on page 16, our bodies will:

a) be reconstituted spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:44)

b) be glorified—given a new capacity

c) be like Christ's own body

Among others, our arrival in heaven is likened to:

a) winning a prize at the end of a race (Phil. 3:14)

b) reaping a good harvest (Ps. 126:6)

c) consummating a marriage (Rev. 19:9)

d) arriving home after a long journey (2 Pet. 1:11)

e) getting the full inheritance (Eph. 1:14)

2. Souls Won for the Master: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

O! If one soul from Anwoth
Meets me God’s right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Emmanuel’s land.

(Ann Ross Cousin from the letters of Samuel Rutherford —Anwoth was Rutherford’s hometown in Scotland)

3. Temporal Things Laid at His Feet: You can’t take it with you…but you can send it on ahead! “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

a) my time

b) my money

c) other possessions

d) my talents

e) my relationships

f) my praise

g) my energy

4. Our Personalities Fashioned on His Wheel: I am not what I ought to be, but, thank God, I am not what I used

to be. And I am not what I shall be: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). In that day, we shall all be beautiful, bearing the family image forever.

5. Lessons Learned in Christ’s School: “For [our fathers] for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:10-11). This chastening (all that is involved in child-training) proves our relationship as “sons,” reveals His high intentions for us, and demonstrates His deep affection towards us.

6. Our Knowledge of God: “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3). We receive this knowledge through:

a) the Word of God when we receive it as babes

b) our experiences as we allow the Spirit to teach us

c) other Christians’ knowledge of Him that they have shared with us or shown us by their lives

d) creation around us (Rom. 1)

7. Our Account Books of our Stewardship: In time we are only training for reigning. The Lord is teaching us the “Family business.” We will be called to account (2 Cor. 5:10) for our stewardship (in grace). Why? Because He will not give us more than we can bear (see 2 Cor. 4:17). “And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and

wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household…?" (Luke 12:42). "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

a) the sort of materials used (1 Cor. 3:13-14); is it fireproof?

b) the amount we have invested (2 Cor. 9:6)

c) things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10) whether good or bad.

Will this be the moment when we shall understand that our sovereign God has been able to weave all things in our lives by grace into the final masterpiece? He will have done "all things well."

8. The Promises of God Yet to be Fulfilled: Our Lord Jesus is a "High Priest of good things to come." We have no idea what He has waiting for us, but we do know some of the promises that have yet to be fulfilled.

a) we shall be like Him

b) we shall "reign with Him" in glory (Rom. 8:18)

c) we will enter into the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

d) we "have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23). The full harvest is yet to be brought in.

"Success is neither fame, wealth, nor power; rather it is seeking, knowing, and loving God." —Charles Malik

Be Fruitful and Multiply (August 2005)

From Uplook, August 2005. Article.

If only we could hear this appeal as straight from the heart of God!

Many fields throughout our needy world are presented to us by the missionary-minded as “the most needy.” No one would think of North America as included in that list. But here are some startling facts:

North America is one of the few continents where biblical Christianity is not growing faster than the population. The current population in the USA is about 295,500,000 and growing at a net gain of one person every 11 seconds. In 1900 there were 27 churches for every 10,000 people. Today there are only 11 churches for every 10,000 people. Church attendance is declining, with actual attendance at only about 20 percent in the US and 7 percent in Canada. At least half of all churches last year did not add one new member through conversion.1

God’s purposes are never stagnant, dormant or sterile. The plant life He designed with “the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself” (v. 11). To His new animal creatures in Genesis 1, He commanded: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth” (v. 22). Likewise to the human family He said, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (v. 28).

The New Testament (or Covenant) was made with a new creation, incorporating "better promises" (Heb. 8:6). And it too, like the first creation, had multiplication in mind. The Lord Jesus turned His disciples into disciple-makers (Mt. 28:19). When, in Acts 2, the Church was born, it was not only made a living organism, but, like the first creation, it had been given a kind of life—by God's enablement—that could reproduce as well. So we read, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly…" (Acts 6:7). "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (9:31). "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

If this is going to happen in our day and on the North American continent, what must be done? How can we multiply? First, five negative positions must be taken:

1. We must stop assuming that it's normative Christianity to be fruitless and powerless, seeing almost no one saved from year to year. That is not God's program.

2. Let's not excuse our lack of blessing, blaming it on the times, the trends, or the truths we hold. How long will we use the lame excuse that the reason people won't come to our assembly is because "we have the truth"? We need to repent of this, realizing that the truth (including whatever we know of it) is beautiful—since "the truth is in Jesus."

3. Stop focusing on what you don't have instead of what you do have. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not

according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12). Can't do this? Then do that—or encourage those who are doing what you can't do. It's that willing mind we need. Then God will put us on the active list, giving us something that suit our abilities.

4. Don't look back. "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). If we could get the same mileage out of our cars as we do out of old hurts and grievances, we'd never have to buy gasoline. Get over it. Life is too short and the issues are too serious to fuss about what someone said or did to me. If I've tried to set it right and it hasn't worked, turn it over to the Heavenly Collection Agency (1 Pet. 2:22-23) and carry on. Soldiers often have to fight on after being wounded.

5. Refuse to judge another man's servant (Rom. 14:4). We will have more than enough to give account for ourselves at the Judgment Seat. Easy enough to sit on the sidelines and criticize those on the field; but three cheers to the ones who, though fearful, put on the uniform and join the fray. If you aren't failing at something, I'd suggest you're not trying to do enough. The Lord let His disciples fail (see Mt. 17:16), in fact encouraged then to take risks (Mt. 13:3-9). But He is angry with talent gravediggers (Lk. 19:20-24), calling them "wicked" servants. His word, not mine.

Now for some positive suggestions (remember to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good," 1 Thess. 5:21):

1. We Need to Reclaim the Three Keys

"Then…the churches…were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (9:31). Note the three ingredients in the multiplication process. Edified + Occupied + Sanctified = Multiplied

First, they were edified. They were in the Word. They were in each others homes and lives, sharing what they had learned. They were building each other up on their most holy faith. Construction crew—not wrecking crew.

Second, they were occupied. Occupied with things above where Christ sits. Walking in the fear of the Lord means living life consciously under the eye of God, having a holy reverence for Him that changes everything from the way you treat your spouse (in private), how you spend money, and what you laugh at. It changes your thought life, your goals in life, everything from stem to stearn.

Third, they were sanctified. They responded quickly to the Spirit's promptings regarding sins to confess, wrongs to right, ministries to perform, and people to visit. They co-operated with the Spirit in His interior decorating project; He co-operated with them in evangelizing the world.

2. The Word Will Need to Get Out

Notice the vital part the Word played in the process of multiplication in the early church: "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7). How does the Word increase? It was the speaking of it that increased. The good news spread far and wide, to high and low, in

season and out of season, publicly and from house to house. Without any mass media, they got the word out world-wide!

The psalmist first declared the process: “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (68:11). During the Lord’s earthly ministry, the same thing happened. We read of the same two stages in the story of the demoniac: “…he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him” (Lk. 8:39). He had a life-changing encounter with the Saviour and didn’t stop talking about it until everyone in town had heard! (See Acts 10:37; 13:49.) It’s that simple: God has spoken to us; we speak to others; others hear Him.

3. The Work Is One Soul at a Time

The Lord’s commission was to preach the gospel “to every creature.” Of course there needs to be public proclamation, but souls must be reached individually. In His marvellous plan, the Lord has suited us for the work by giving us all different personalities, varied contacts, and unique testimonies. Yet God mixes more than He matches, using little children to reach hardened seniors, simple words to reach intellectuals, and the most unlikely to do His work “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29). Our weaknesses may very well be our weapons.

Michael Loftis writes: “Today’s church, currently estimated to be approximately half a billion gospel-believing people, is larger than any army in the world.” 1 Even if the number were only one tenth that, such an army of witnesses could, by sharing the gospel with not

much more than 100 distinct people, reach the whole world.

4. We Must Rethink NT Simplicity

The New Testament church was God plus redeemed people at work. We may have things far too complicated. If we're going to see thousands saved, we probably won't be able to build million-dollar buildings across the landscape. We must keep firmly in mind that the church in its most vigorous days could rapidly deploy, shift gears quickly, move into promising regions, and felt no obligation to maintain shrinking assemblies because there were no buildings to care about. Deacons, instead of repairing structures and cutting grass, were out visiting widows, caring for the poor of the flock, even street preaching.

Here's what Norm Nickas, a leading Baptist, has to say:

The church must commit itself to developing a reproducible system or method of church multiplication that is not primarily dependent on money, land and buildings….1

I certainly don't object to modest, functional buildings (hopefully used for more than a few hours a week). But if we hope to see many new gatherings springing up across the landscape, there are all sorts of public rooms available (as well as homes) so our resources can be put once again into missionary enterprise at home and abroad. In several instances that I know personally, the cost of one new assembly building could have financed an evangelistic campaign that would—by conservative estimates—have placed a gospel CD into the homes of five million people!

I remember years ago travelling with Bill MacDonald past the Mormon temple overlooking San Francisco Bay.

“I’m sure glad they build those things,” he said.

“Why?” I asked, incredulous.

“Because then the money doesn’t go into literature.”

He’s a man that knows the value of getting the Word out. So should we all.

1 Message magazine, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 9

Paper Missionaries (August 2005)

From Uplook, August 2005. Article.

It has been estimated that only 2 percent of American Christians regularly share their faith. But one way that even the most timid can begin is by placing tracts along the way. You can include them with bill payments (paid on time, of course), or with (substantial) meal tips, if you still don't feel courageous enough to hand them out to strangers.

Some might feel that tracts are not the best way, but as Kirk Cameron, well-known actor (Buck Williams in Left Behind) and avid tract distributor, says: "Since I've become passionate about reaching the lost, I've realized that the gospel on paper is infinitely better than no gospel at all."

Tracts need not be the beginning and end of the contact. They can be a good conversation-starter. But they also keep speaking long after I have said goodbye.

So why don't more people hand out tracts? Ray Comfort (founder of Living Waters Publications—see their eye-catching tracts at www.livingwaters.com) puts it bluntly: "Fear. Fear of rejection and ridicule…

"The Bible gives the analogy that we are like fire-fighters, pulling people from the flames. I have known the shyest people to be the most compassionate evangelists."

We're grateful for groups like Jews for Jesus, who handed out one million tracts in New York City just this

past July (according to reports, they have handed out, one-on-one, 40 million tracts worldwide).

During the last 40 years, Chick Tracts has sold more than 500 million of their cartoon-style booklets (some more scriptural than others). Their most popular, “This Was Your Life,” is credited with pointing thousands to Christ.

American Tract Society, founded on May 11, 1825, records “a cumulative publishing history of 10 billion pages of tracts, books and Bibles printed in more than 188 languages, and circulated in almost every country on the globe,” according to its website (www.atstracts.org). After September 11, its tract “America Under Attack” sold more than 3.5 million copies in one month.

THE CHALLENGE: If only ten percent of our Uplook readers (of those who aren’t presently distributing tracts) would each give out just one a day, I estimate we would easily exceed that 3.5 million number over the next decade, if the Lord has not returned.

Like snowflakes, insignificant on their own, tracts can have a cumulative effect that—little by little—are able to cover the world with a blanket of good news from the heart of God.

When to Let Go (September-October 2005)

From Uplook, September-October 2005. Editorial.

Christian service is not only a race for the prize; it’s also a race against time.

Very brave people deftly slapped a baton into the trembling and perspiring palm of a teenage fellow who, although uneven in his gait and well behind in the pack, was seeking to run the same race as they. Inexperienced but eager, he had his eye, if not yet on the goal, at least peering a fair way down the road. What they saw in his efforts that made them hand over prized ministries to him, heaven will some day reveal. But it made me, the at-that-time lanky, flame-haired youth, passionate to please them by pleasing the One they had served faithfully for so many years.

I was in my late teens when, one summer, our family traveled through Grand Rapids and stopped at the Pell home. I recall it as vividly as if it were yesterday because William Pell, a very busy man, took most of the day to spend it just with me. He enlarged my vision that day—of the great need for communicating truth by the printed page, and of the part I might have in such a venture. I never got over it.

I could hardly believe it when he asked me to write a few short articles for Truth for Youth, the Sunday School paper that he published for young people. I remember working so hard, checking every word, and tremblingly handing it in to the editorial staff. I was amazed and thrilled to watch it being typeset on the old Linotype,

printed on a letterpress, and then sent out in the post to faraway places that I thought I would never visit. As I read the little articles now, I marvel at the courage of the publisher—and at the consummate skills of the editors.

It wasn't long until printer's ink flowed in my veins, and I caught the burden for broadcasting gospel seed. Ed Harlow also, in those early years, encouraged me, using my book cover "designs" which I now cringe to observe. But these men, and others like them, showed me not only the courage and grace and wisdom it takes to give up God-given ministries as a sacred trust to others; they also modeled the importance of looking out for young people seeking to run the race, and putting something of value into their hands. It is this sacrificial act that turns the cross-country lope into a heart-pounding, give-it-your-all, flat-out, risk-everything-for-Him race to the finish.

How pathetic to see assemblies and ministries flounder and fail because men, often good men, get a death grip on the baton. They are fearful to let some bright-eyed, energetic young man (who has shown faithfulness and commitment in some measure) try to do imperfectly what they do competently after years of experience. If only they could remember their first efforts and the Lord's grace in using them in their early years.

Do they fear as well that, giving up this ministry, they will have nothing left to do? I can hardly imagine it. Hearts break for want of a visit from caring senior saints. Young people stumble in the road for lack of supporting prayer and loving words of encouragement. There is more work today than there has ever been.

Now as I pass on this editorial ministry to my dear brother James Martin of Sudbury, a man far more qualified than I when I was handed the task, I ask for your faithful prayers for him and those who assist him in the work—that Uplook magazine will be far more effective than it has ever been in bringing glory to the Lord and blessing to His dear people.

Jamie, the baton.

Big Business (September-October 2005)

From Uplook, September-October 2005. Article.

Seeking for souls. That's the business God has on His heart.

There is a happy elderly couple now living at a retirement home in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I visited with them last week. They are the kind of souls that reflect the cheering rays of heaven's light upon you because they live in the roseate hues of that Sonlit land. As he told me, "We pray for you and Louise and each member of your family by name every day." What is that worth? Thankfully the benefits of such intercession can be imported across international borders without tariffs or taxes.

But I happen to know a little secret about this couple. When they lived in a lovely seaside town further south, I visited them in their little home there, too. It was as modest, neat, bright and cheery as its inhabitants.

There were many Bible texts and mottos here and there around the place (a habit frequently seen in our seniors' homes but not always carried on by the next generation). But one motto especially caught my eye.

It was not a direct quotation from the Scriptures, but exactly captured the spirit of Christianity as seen in the early chapters of the book of Acts. And for those interested in Church history, it also was evident in every great revival. We could also include those revivals seen in the Old Testament for evidence of something similar.

Their motto read: “Economize to evangelize.” The idea being that the best blue chip investment is in everlasting souls. How do we know? Because the Heir of all things—the One who could say, “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts” (Hag. 2:8)—He said it was so. Listen to His words: “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations” (Lk. 16:9).

Big Business

Want friendships that last? Lead people to Christ. Some of them will be at the door of Heaven to receive you when you get Home.

Want to know what do do with your financial resources—the mammon of unrighteousness? Take what has been used by others for the wrong things and use it for the right thing: put it into gospel work.

But you might need it for a rainy day? Trust the Lord who controls the rainy days. He challenges us to put our money into His Big Project. I understand He’s a very good businessman. Being about His Father’s business, He has plans for a major takeover. Soon those who invested in this world will find their treasures have been atomized, or so says Peter:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting

unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Having heard about the Gospel bus…and the Sprinter van…and the trailer, one brother called up and said, "I have a trailer that I'm not using. If you hear about some young men interested in doing gospel work, I'll give it to them."

Isn't that what we need, a thousand times over?

Let me hold lightly things of this earth;
Transient treasures, what are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay,
All of their beauty fades in a day.
Let me hold lightly temporal things;
I who am deathless, I who wear wings!
Let me hold fast, Lord, things of the skies;
Quicken my vision, open my eyes!
Show me Thy riches, glory and grace,
Boundless as time is, endless as space!
Let me hold lightly things that are mine—
Lord, Thou hast giv'n me all that is Thine!

—Martha Snell Nicholson

The Elder’s Wife (September-October 2005)

From Uplook, September-October 2005. Poem.

We thank the Lord for each elder
Who willingly lays down his life
To care for the sheep of His pastures green,
But what of the elder’s wife?
The elder seeks for the wand’rer
Who has strayed away from home;
But we mustn’t forget the elder’s wife
Often keeping her vigil alone.
How often she sees her husband
With a troubled look in his eye,
And she doesn’t know what weighs him down
But the Lord hears her plaintive cry.
The Lord who observed the woman
Who cast in her living complete
Still sees you sisters who give Him your all,
Laid with joy at the Master’s feet.
Like those valued far above rubies
Whose husbands sit in the gates,
They rise up and call you blessed, but—
The Lord’s “Well done” also awaits!
For those companions in labor,
With your husband you pour out your life;
The elders will hear Heaven’s thanks that day,
But so will the elder’s wife.

What’s Missing in Our Gospel Work? (November-December 2005)

From Uplook, November-December 2005. Article.

We’re beginning to spread seed around more than in the recent past. Where are the sheaves?

We often treat revival as if it were as capricious as lightning striking. Is that true? The wind of the Spirit is evidently blowing in China, north India and parts of Africa. Must we just satisfy ourselves with quoting, “The wind blows where it wants to” and leave it at that? Or are there keys in the Word that show us the way into real blessing?

Where Is the Rain?

Read carefully the words of Isaiah 55:10-11, “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I send it.”

It is easy to misapply this illustration. We know that often in Scripture the seed and bread are pictures of the Word in two distinct aspects—the seed as the potential of the gospel for the lost, and bread as the provision of nourishing truth for the believer. And surely that is true in this passage as well.

However, you will note that here the “as” and “so” link the rain and snow with God’s Word. May I suggest that

there is a third aspect to the Word of God here. The bread is the Word as we receive it for personal sustenance. The seed is the Word as we speak it to the lost. But this is not enough. Much seed has been spread around but seems to be lying dormant without springing to life. What is the matter?

Thank the Lord for a soul being saved now and again, a sprout of true life springing up here and there in the vast fields of North America. But we certainly are not seeing the sheaves being gathered as the Lord promised. Did He promise sheaves? Yes, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall DOUBTLESS come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6). If this is the sure promise of God, what is missing?

There have been various suggestions made for the lack of blessing seen in gospel work in North America. Here are some of the more popular:

THE WEST HAS HAD ITS CHANCE, some say; our time has passed. Yet millions of non-Westerners (who have not had their chance) are flooding onto our shores—who, if they stayed in their own countries, might have a better chance of being saved! That certainly would be true of the Chinese, for example, where thousands every day are coming to Christ.

THIS IS A DAY OF SMALL THINGS. We have already pointed out in other articles that misapplying a verse describing the situation during the Tribulation just won’t fly. Besides, Zechariah (4:10) isn’t describing small results. The results are a company that no man can number, according to John (Rev. 7:9)! No, he is referring

to small resources—two witnesses who will reap this mighty harvest from all nations.

THIS IS THE LAODICEAN AGE. Assuming that the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 portray seven ages in the history of the Church, it should be noted that the last four churches are promised the coming of the Lord. You don't have to be a Laodicean assembly during the Laodicean period. Besides, it surely isn't Laodicean in other parts of the world. No, this excuse won't do, either. The Lord Jesus, after all, promised to be with us right to the end of the age as we seek to fulfill the Commission.

It would be good to remind ourselves of the factors that haven't changed since the days when believers brought in armloads of souls.

THE GREAT COMMISSION HASN'T CHANGED. The gospel is still to be preached to every creature—in our cities, our neighborhoods, our families, to our workmates (but not on company time). We are all to be involved.

THE POWER OF GOD TO SAVE HASN'T CHANGED. His arm isn't shortened; His ear isn't heavy. He is the one who calls us to redouble our efforts: if those invited refuse, go elsewhere and compel them to come in.

THE WORD OF GOD HASN'T CHANGED. It is still "the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK HASN'T CHANGED, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. NOR HAS THE POWER OF PRAYER CHANGED. So what has changed?

Of course, to have successful harvests we must sow the good seed “beside all waters” (Isa. 32:20) at all times (Eccl. 11:6) and in all conditions—“in season and out of season.” We do need to think about where, when, how, and how much seed is being distributed.

But there are two ingredients missing if we are merely throwing seed around. Hosea puts his finger on the problem: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you” (10:12).

Here are the missing two key factors.

First, before sowing the Word, we must break up the fallow ground. If not, you might as well sow corn on concrete. Notice that it is “your” ground. The plowing must begin in our own hearts, exposing ourselves to God.

Second, and directly related to this, we need the rain and snow. The moisture is the heavenly influence that germinates the seed and causes it to grow. Of what do they speak?

We know that a person is not saved by merely hearing Christians quote Bible verses. It is not hearing about Christ that saves a person; this occurs when they hear Him. Conviction and conversion come to the soul when we realize that Christ is risen indeed and is personally calling us. What a day!

It is the water of God’s word spoken from heaven that confirms and germinates the seed planted by men. It is the rain and snow (in season and out of season) that we

need. Why does it not fall? Is it as uncertain as our modern weather reports?

Israel is a narrow strip of land along the windward edge of the Mediterranean. Unlike Egypt with its seasonal Nile flood, it was “a land…[that] drinketh water of the rain of heaven” (Dt. 11:11). The Lord promised two annual rainy seasons, regular as clockwork: “I will give you the rain of your land in due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn…” (v. 14).

But while these rains were regular, not capricious, they were contingent on obedience. Jeremiah, Hosea and Joel (5:24; 6:3; 2:23) spoke of this, as did Solomon in his dedicatory prayer: “When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because we have sinned against Thee, and shall turn again to Thee, and confess Thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto Thee…Then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy people” (1 Ki. 8:35f).

I believe we will not begin to bring in sheaves until, our hearts broken up before God, we make detailed confession of our sins. Only then can we expect God’s rain, fulfilling Paul’s prayer: “Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:10).

Motivation for Evangelization (November-December 2005)

From Uplook, November-December 2005. Article.

Breaking through barriers on the road to becoming a soul winner.

Paul was not naturally bold; at least he didn't think so. We know this because he wrote to the Ephesians: "Pray…for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel…that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (6:18-20). He asked not once but twice that he might be bold in testimony.

Paul knew what his detractors said of him: "His letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). What helped him to break through the natural barriers of diminutive stature and halting speech to become not only the articulate teacher of those "weighty" letters, but also the principal evangelist of Europe?

I find it relatively enjoyable to minister the Word to believers or to write Bible-based material, either for saved or lost. Even to witness one-on-one (once a hard challenge) has become a joy to me after being honest with the Lord about my cowardice and asking Him for boldness and opportunities. But to speak wisely, creatively, biblically, powerfully, and winsomely to a non-captive mixed audience as Paul did at Mars' Hill—that is something I only do well in my dreams. That's why I'm

personally interested in Paul's motivations. Let him tell us:

1. "Knowing…the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Not His terror against us, of course. But, says Paul, we believe in the lake of fire even if many unbelievers don't. So we don't just casually mention the possibility of salvation—we want to persuade. We sound somewhat like fire alarms because we believe there is a fire. We preach to men "condemned already."

2. "I purposed to come unto you…that I might have some fruit among you also…. I am ready to preach the gospel…" (see Rom. 1:13-15). Paul longed for fruit everywhere, in answer to the words of His Master, "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (Jn. 15:8). Paul felt the burden to look after the Father's vineyard better than the previous husbandmen had done. Do we long for "much fruit"? Paul did, and Jesus did, too. They didn't subscribe to the "as long as you're faithful, don't be concerned about fruit" philosophy.

3. "…I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them" (Rom. 11:13-14). Paul had been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, but he hoped that the more Gentiles were saved, the more Jews would be provoked to salvation. What vision! What strategic thinking! How like the heart of God were Paul's varied efforts that, "by all means" (consistent with the message), he might win some.

4. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14). Paul goes on to explain that the logic of Calvary is flawless. One died for all, therefore all must have been dead.

Therefore the life we have is not our own. Therefore we should live as He wants us to live. In other words, to live daily as ambassadors for heaven. The love that moved Him to leave heaven for this sorry planet should be the great motivator that moves us out into the streets and lanes for Him.

5. “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ…?” (1 Thes. 2:19). The Lord is coming! But though the catching up is to “the Lord,” it will be “with them” (1 Thes. 4:17). With whom? Hopefully that number will include those whom we have invited to join us there. “When I get to that beautiful city, and the saints all around me appear, I want to have somebody tell me, ‘It was you who invited me here.”

After the ascension of Christ, we have only one prayer recorded by the Eleven. Its subject? BOLDNESS. See Acts 4:29.

Are we missing something here? When did you last hear such a prayer for the saints in the meetings of our “New Testament churches”?

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