

THE
JOURNEY *of*

LIFE

*Stages of Spiritual Growth As Seen in the
Song of Songs and the Psalms*

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The Journey of Life
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PREFACE

This volume contains two series of messages, one on the Psalms of Ascent and one on the Song of Songs.

The Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120—134) were to be sung by the children of Israel while ascending Mount Zion in Jerusalem for the three annual feasts before the Lord. The physical ascent of the Israelites up Mount Zion typifies the spiritual ascent of Christian believers through their growth in life and their experience. The fifteen Psalms of Ascent can be divided into five “stages” of three Psalms each, depicting our progress in the Christian life and the church life through the stages of vision, consecration, enjoyment, enlargement, and maturity.

Likewise, the Song of Songs is a portrait of our Christian experience. As we love and pursue the Lord, this book serves as a wonderful guide. It makes us clear concerning our present situation, what experiences we should expect, and how we should go on in our Christian life. A normal seeking Christian should labor on the Song of Songs, be familiar with it, and pay the price to experience all the riches revealed in it. If we are equipped in this way, it will be easy for us to work with the Lord in our environment.

The messages on the Psalms were spoken to the church in Chicago in 1988. Those on the Song of Songs were given to a small group of Christ lovers in 1974 in Taipei, Taiwan, for their experience of the growth in life and their enjoyment of their lover, Christ.

PART I

THE PSALMS
OF
ASCENT

CHAPTER ONE

PSALMS 120-122—THE STAGE OF VISION

INTRODUCTION: A PICTURE OF OUR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

In the Old Testament there are fifteen psalms called the “Psalms of Ascent,” which together make up one of the most precious and beautiful portions of the Bible. These psalms were to be sung when the children of Israel came to Jerusalem and ascended to the top of Mount Zion three times a year, where they would hold a feast before the Lord. The physical ascent of the Israelites up Mount Zion is a type, or a picture, of the spiritual ascent of Christian believers through their growth in life and experience. The first Psalm of Ascent, Psalm 120, begins, “In my distress I called out to Jehovah.” This is a picture of regeneration. When we first cried out to the Lord, we were saved. The last Psalm of Ascent, Psalm 134, begins, “Bless Jehovah now, all you servants of Jehovah who stand by night in the house of Jehovah.” Here we see servants of the Lord who are no longer in the world, but in the Lord’s house. They stand “by night,” which refers to the time immediately before the Lord comes back. These servants are those who are standing for God’s testimony and are exercising in the church life to bring the Lord back. Therefore, these fifteen short psalms give us an overall picture of our Christian growth from regeneration to the Lord’s return.

We can divide these fifteen psalms into five “stages” of three

psalms each. We are not looking at these psalms from a scholarly point of view. Rather, we will treat them in a simple way according to our experience. Psalms 120-122 are the first stage, the stage of “vision.” The second stage, Psalms 123-125, focuses on our consecration. Out of our vision we come to a consecration. The third stage, Psalms 126-128, is the stage of enjoyment. Our consecration leads to a rich enjoyment of the Lord. The fourth stage, Psalms 129-131, we will call the stage of enlargement. Our enjoyment of the Lord eventually causes us to become an enlarged person. Then from our experience of enlargement we enter the final stage, the stage of maturity (Psalms 132-134).

The second and third stages can also be grouped together as one portion. Even though we are separating them, this doesn’t mean that we go through the stage of consecration and afterwards enter into the stage of enjoyment. We should not think that in the stage of enjoyment consecration is over, so we can love the world and love the Lord together. In our experience, whenever our consecration is gone, then our enjoyment of the Lord is also gone. If we want to enjoy the Triune God then we must be a consecrated person all the time. The moment we are away from consecration we are also out of the enjoyment. Sometimes we think, “I did quite well yesterday. Today I can be relaxed.” Then our enjoyment is gone. Consecration and enjoyment come together in our experience. However, we will still treat them as two separate stages of three psalms each.

We will share five messages. Each message will cover one stage, or one group of three psalms. Our ability to apprehend these messages is based on our level of experience. Some of these messages may be beyond our grasp. If we appreciate the first message the most, that probably means we are recently saved. If we enjoy the second message the most, that means we have gone farther in our growth. If we get lost by the fifth message, that means we still have a long way to go. The more we understand a message, the more we know we have experienced it. Our experience will determine our ability to understand.

THE FIRST STAGE: A THREE-FOLD VISION

The first stage of the Psalms of Ascent is the stage of vision. There are three aspects to the vision we must have in following the Lord. Each aspect is crucial and necessary. We need to have a vision concerning the world, a vision concerning the Lord, and a vision concerning the church life. This vision is three-dimensional. If any one of us is lacking in any one of these three aspects, our growth and our progress will not be so healthy.

Many who have been among us once loved the Lord but eventually went back to the world. This doesn't necessarily mean that they didn't enjoy the church life. They may have enjoyed the church life, but they didn't have a vision concerning the world. In other words, they didn't see through the world. They didn't realize its true nature. The world can become very tempting and attractive to those who love the Lord. This is why we must have a clear vision concerning the world.

Furthermore, many of us love the Lord and love the church life, but are not able to go on buoyantly. We go forward a little bit, but then become afraid. Some of us here are around the age of thirty-five. Thirty-five is a crucial age, because the Bible says that a man's normal life expectancy is around seventy. This means that thirty-five is a half-way mark. As we approach thirty-five it is easy to consider, "Is the Lord really that trustworthy?" If someone were to say, "Don't believe in the Lord," we would say, "No, I have to believe in Him." But then if someone were to say, "You must trust the Lord in full," we would wonder, "But is the Lord really able to care for me?" Some in the church life who loved the Lord when they were young gradually "migrated" from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of Satan in their daily life. Why? Because their vision was not so clear concerning the Lord. They didn't have the full realization of who Christ is.

Finally, some Christians see that the world is empty and that the Lord is trustworthy, but they miss the vision of the church. They just cannot enjoy the church life. For this reason they cannot go on healthily and properly. This is why, in the first stage of the Psalms

of Ascent, there are three psalms to show us three aspects of our vision. At the beginning of our Christian life we need a vision concerning the world. We need to see that the world is vanity and emptiness. Then we also need to see who our Lord really is, so that we will give ourselves to Him and fully trust in Him. Finally, we need to see the church, so that our life can be filled with enjoyment. Psalms 120-122 are concerning these three aspects of our vision.

**PSALM 120: THE VISION OF THE WORLD—
A PLACE OF LIES, DECEIT, AND VANITY**

In the World There is Only Distress

Psalm 120 shows us a clear picture of the world. It is short, but very precise. The psalm begins, “In my distress I called out to Jehovah, and He answered me. O Jehovah, deliver my soul from lying lips, from a tongue of deceit” (v. 1-2). What is the most striking thing about the world? In the world, your life is a life of distress. You confront one difficulty after another all of the time. In the world there is no strength or comfort. The ascent up Mount Zion begins with the realization that in the world there is only distress. When the Israelites were singing these Psalms of Ascent as they were going up Mount Zion they must have realized this. In the world there was only distress, without strength or comfort.

The World is Full of Lies and Deceit

What else is in the world? Lying lips and a deceitful tongue. Lying lips are for defending yourself, while a deceitful tongue is for gaining something for yourself. In other words, when you want to take advantage of others you become deceitful. When you want to defend yourself, you become a liar. In the world there is nothing but lies and deceit. People lie to you to take advantage of you, and they lie to protect and defend themselves. The world is filled with deceitfulness. The world is a world of lies.

For example, when you graduate from college, a certain com-

pany will come to you to cheat you. The company is deceitful. They will portray a beautiful picture to you. “If you just serve in our company, then after forty years we will give you this amount of money to retire.” They never tell you that this company may not last forty years. They make many promises, but there is no guarantee that their company will last long enough to fulfill their word. This means that they cheat you. They do their best to deceive you so that they can gain your soul and your person. But those who apply for such a job also do their best to lie. They put on their resume, “I am good at this, I am able to do that.” Even when it is not true, they embellish their record. So the two parties mutually lie to one another.

From the beginning the psalmist portrays the world in such an accurate way. He exposes the world’s true nature. He doesn’t merely say that the world is so evil and sinful. Instead he says that in the world there are all sorts of lies. These lies are the source of all the evil. Once a person abides in lies and falsehood, all kinds of evil things can come in. This is why in the beginning of this psalm, the psalmist cries out to God, “O Jehovah, deliver my soul.” What does he need to be delivered from? Not only the world, but himself. He realizes that if he is in the world he can only end up with lying lips.

We do not know how much we lie. Even when we are speaking the truth, we may lie. Sometimes we lie by the way we use our voice. Our words are right, but our voice is a lie. Our whole person can be in lies. So here the psalmist cries out, “O Jehovah, deliver my soul from lying lips, from a tongue of deceit.” Not only does he desire to be delivered from his own lies, but he desires to be delivered from the deceitful tongues of those around him so that he would not be cheated anymore.

The World's Lies Kill and Burn Continually

Then the psalmist continues, “What should be given to you, and what further shall be done to you, O tongue of deceit?” (v. 3). In this world, every tongue is a false and deceitful tongue. In this world, not one person can face reality. We know that the politicians lie, but even the preachers lie. The non-Christians lie, but the Christians also may lie. Eventually what do we get from all of these lies? The psalmist goes on to tell us that we get two things: “The sharp arrows of a mighty man, with the burning coals of the broom tree!” (v. 4). This means that all those who love the world, and all those who abide in the lies of the world, will be killed by the world's deceit. This is all that the world can give us.

As an example, you may work for a company. Suppose you do something that makes the company wealthy. Surely you will be rewarded. The company may promote you and give you an award to honor you. But eventually, it is all lies. The award is real, but everything behind it is a lie. In one or two years they may no longer want you. They will lay you off without considering how much money you made for them. In the world, everyone uses each other. This is what the psalmist means by “the sharp arrows of a mighty man.” Whosoever loves the world will be killed by the world. What will the world give to you? The sharp arrows of a mighty man.

The next item is even worse: “The burning coals of the broom tree.” The broom tree is very rich in its content. Once it burns, it is hard to extinguish. In this world, people live in lies. These lies are like burning coals. It is very hard for them to be extinguished. All kinds of lies are going on in the world all the time. Not only do these lies kill us, but they continue for a long time. They burn like coals which cannot be extinguished.

Lies can continue for many generations. For example, one of the greatest philosophers is Confucius. He is responsible for the unity of China's culture and civilization. Confucius stressed the virtue of living in simplicity. There is a famous story of Confucius praising one of his disciples. This disciple had learned to be joyful even with simple food and some water from a bucket. This disciple's

joyfulness never changed. But eventually Confucius himself lived a very luxurious life. He made a declaration that if his meat was not sliced evenly, he would not eat it. He also he said that if his dining table was not set properly, then in the name of etiquette he wouldn't even sit down. The table had to be set a certain way, and his meat had to be sliced a certain way, but he praised his disciple who had almost nothing to eat. Then isn't he a liar? His disciple was like an assistant, yet Confucius would not pay him more. Couldn't he at least have given his disciple some meat that was not sliced right? What kind of great philosopher is this?

On the one hand, we should appreciate Confucius. If it were not for him China would be divided into more countries even than Europe. But on the other hand, such an ethical person still lived in lies. He even lied without consciousness. His lies are like burning coals of the broom tree. After two thousand years, they are still burning. They are even prevailing. We must see that the whole world is filled with lies. These lies kill, but at the same time they continue. They burn and they smolder for generations.

As those who are following the Lord we need to have a vision concerning the world. We especially need to see *through* the world. Suppose a brother among us obtains his doctorate and is ready for a profession. If a university offers this brother a professorship then he will probably become excited. However, he should not get too excited. Instead, he should tell himself, "What can the world give me? Only sharp arrows of a mighty man to kill me, and burning coals of the broom tree which burn continuously." A professor's lies will continue for a very long time. When we talk about the world, we should be realistic. We should see through it. What is in the world? Nothing but deceit. Nothing but killing. Nothing but the continual burning of lies.

The World of Prosperity is Outside of God's Purpose

The psalmist continues, "Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, I dwell among the tents of Kedar" (v. 5). When we are in the world we realize, "Woe is me." Meshech was a descendant of Japheth.

In the Bible there are three lines, from the three sons of Noah: the line of Japheth, the line of Ham, and the line of Shem. In the book of Genesis, Noah blessed his son Japheth by saying that God would enlarge him (Gen. 9:27). This means that Japheth's line would have the ability to conquer and become prevailing. But the line of Japheth has nothing to do with God Himself. God's will is not accomplished through the line of Japheth. Instead, His will is accomplished through the line of Shem. For us to sojourn in the land of Meshech means we are in a land that may be prosperous and powerful, but we are outside of the good land where God accomplishes His purpose.

In the world there is prosperity. In the world there is a kind of conquering. Furthermore, in the world there are many things which are enjoyable. Yet these things are related to Meshech. They are not in the line of Shem. In other words, these things are outside of God's purpose. Because Meshech was a descendant of Japheth he was outside, and even against, God's economy. In these verses the psalmist is saying, "Woe is me. I travel and sojourn in this world. This world is prevailing and powerful. But in this world I am outside of the good land, the land of God's economy." We must see that the things of this world have nothing to do with God's eternal purpose. They are all vanity.

Meshech represents the world which is conquering and prevailing. The business world is like this. People form partnerships, like Sears and Roebuck, so that their business can become more prevailing and successful. Human history is a history of conquering. It is a history of prosperity. But such a history is not a history of God's economy. The young people among us should realize that in the world they may have a great future, but that great future has nothing to do with God. They can become a modern-day "Sears" or "Roebuck." They can become the president of a company. But all of that has nothing to do with God's desire. It is all vanity. This is why the psalmist says, "Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech."

The World of Religion is Far Away from God

The second aspect of the world is signified by “the tents of Kedar” (v. 5). Kedar was a descendant of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. Because Kedar was a descendant of Abraham, he was somewhat related to God, but he was still on the wrong line. There is a part of the world which is related to God, and even came out from God to a certain degree, yet it is not what God really wants. This part of the world which is related to God is eventually against God the most. Who today, in the physical world, is against God the most? The descendants of Ishmael, which are today’s Arabs. Physically speaking, these are the ones who live in the tents of Kedar.

“The tents of Kedar” also indicates a wandering tribe. Those who are in this tribe are never settled. They never have a purpose or a goal. They have God as their Creator, and they even call Him their God. Yet at the same time they never know how to be one with God, how to satisfy God, how to stand with God, how to fulfill God’s purpose, or how to produce God’s habitation. They are related to God in a certain way, yet they are far away from God and from what He is after. Eventually they may even frustrate and oppose God’s purpose. Spiritually speaking, this is the world of religion.

When we look at the world, we see many positive and attractive things. We see a world of promise and prosperity. Anyone who wants to give himself to the world can become extremely successful. This is symbolized by the land of Meshech. On the other hand, there is another world, the world of religion. This world has God, and is even somewhat related to God, but it is not according to God’s purpose. Those who are in this world do not satisfy God’s need. This is why the psalmist portrays the world in such a way. “I sojourn in Meshech”: I am in the world of prosperity. “I dwell among the tents of Kedar”: I am in the world of religion. Both of these aspects of the world are not what God wants. The psalmist laments that because he is in the world he is far from God’s desire.

**When We are for God,
the World will Rise Up for War**

“Long has my soul had its dwelling with him who hates peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war” (v. 6-7). When we desire to go after God, then the world is for war. If we are not for God, if we are just in the world speaking lies and deceiving each other, then no one will care. This will not seem so bad to the world, because we can still gain some prosperity, and we can still be in religion. But when we say, “I am for peace,” when we say that we are for the Lord and for what is real on this earth, then the whole world will rise up: “We are for war! If you are not part of us, we will fight against you!” If a college student declares on his campus, “I am a Christian. I love the Lord!” then all of his friends and classmates will be for war. They will fight against him. This is the world. The world will never tolerate anyone who lives a life solely for God. That is why the psalmist says, “I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.” First the world is a world of lies, but eventually it wars against those who want God. As those who are following the Lord, we all must have such a clear vision. This concludes the psalmist’s description of the world.

**PSALM 121: THE VISION OF THE LORD—
THE ONE WHO KEEPS US FOR HIS TESTIMONY**

Leaving the World and Coming to God

Psalm 121 begins, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come? My help comes from Jehovah, who made heaven and earth” (v. 1-2). We received a vision from the previous psalm that the world is a constitution of lies and vanity. Once we see through the world we have no other choice but to come to God. In Psalm 121 we come to the very God who is the Maker of heaven and earth. Leaving the world behind, we begin our spiritual ascent up Mount Zion.

The Lord Will Not Let Us Fall Back into the World

“He will not let your foot slip; He who keeps you will not slumber” (v. 3). When we come to the Lord, He will not let our foot slip. This means that once we come to the Lord, He has a “keeping” power. For our foot to slip means to go back to the world. The Lord will keep us from sliding back to the world. When we see the world with all its emptiness, we come to cry out to God. When we come to Him, what happens? Praise the Lord, He keeps us! He secures us! We have all had this experience. Even though we love the Lord, we have tried to go back to the world. Yet this very Creator, the Maker of heaven and earth, would not allow our foot to slip.

Furthermore, “He who keeps you will not slumber.” Our God does not go to sleep. Sometimes we may think, “Lord, You are keeping me today, but tomorrow, when You are napping, I will sneak back to the world.” But the Lord is still with us. He doesn’t stop guarding us. He keeps us from falling back into the world. Shouldn’t we be so thankful to the Lord? The One who guards us and keeps us does not slumber. He will not allow our foot to slip back into the world. Even if we try to return to the world, He will say, “No. I am keeping you.”

The Lord is the Keeper of Israel – His Testimony

The psalmist continues, “Behold, Israel’s Keeper will neither slumber nor sleep” (v. 4). We must realize that the Lord’s keeping of us is not for our sake. At first we may think, “He keeps *my* foot.” But eventually we realize, “He is keeping *Israel*.” He is not keeping a person, He is keeping a testimony. He is not keeping us for our own sake, He is keeping us for His testimony’s sake. Such a realization means that we are ascending in our experience and understanding. When we are young in the Lord, we feel many times that we are being kept for our own sake. After we have a little growth in life, we begin to realize, “No, this is not for me. This is for His testimony. He is keeping me for His testimony’s sake.” This is a spiritual “ascent.” We not only ascend out of the world,

we not only ascend into Christ, but we also ascend into the very desire of God. We begin to realize, “My God is a God of purpose. My God has a desire. My God has something to accomplish – that is, His testimony.” At such a moment we have had some ascending. Our Lord is the Lord that keeps Israel. This One shall never slumber nor sleep.

The Lord Becomes Our Rest When We Live for His Testimony and Exalt Him

After saying that Jehovah is the Keeper of Israel, the psalmist goes on to say, “Jehovah is your Keeper; Jehovah is your shade at your right hand” (v. 5). This is such a restful word. When we are still living for ourselves it seems that sometimes the Lord keeps us, and other times He does not. Of course, He is still keeping us regardless of what we may think. But once we are no longer living for ourselves and instead are living for the Lord’s testimony, then we become peaceful and restful. We realize that His keeping of us is not merely a matter of our personal struggles as a Christian. He is not keeping us so that we would have a victory or become spiritually prevailing. He is not keeping us for our own sake. Instead, He is keeping us for the sake of His testimony. We should all learn to be joyful. We should enjoy the fact that our Lord keeps us. We should realize, “I am being kept not for my own sake, but for the church in my locality’s sake. Praise the Lord, He is keeping me for the sake of His testimony.” Such a keeping is truly glorious.

This verse also says, “Jehovah is your shade at your right hand” (v. 5) With this kind of keeping we know how to put the Lord in the proper place. In the Bible “the right hand” is the place of exalting. To have the Lord on our right hand means that we exalt Him. It means that we say, “Now You really are my Lord.” At the beginning of this psalm the writer lifted up his eyes to the hills for help. This was actually still quite low. But now he has grown to the point where the Lord is at his right hand. The Lord is exalted. When we have a proper understanding of the Lord’s keeping we will know how to exalt Him. Then He will be at our right hand, where He

becomes our shade. When we exalt the Lord and give Him the highest place, He becomes “the shade at our right hand.” He becomes our rest. Not only are we kept by Him, but He gives us grace, mercy, comfort, and strength. Our whole life becomes one of enjoyment because we have exalted Him.

The Lord will Be Our Protection

“The sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night” (v. 6). This is a simple testimony from the psalmist. It means that in God’s creation we will be protected. The psalmist continues, “Jehovah will keep you from all evil; He will keep your soul” (v. 7). This means that Satan will not be able to do that much against us. Also, the Lord will keep our soul. This indicates that even *we* will not be able to do too much damage to ourselves. The Lord will protect us in these three ways: from His natural creation, from the evil of Satan, and from ourselves. Sometimes we try to forget the Lord and do something which is actually self-destructive. But even when we manage to do something self-destructive, such as losing our temper, eventually we still come back to the Lord and repent. This shows that the Lord still keeps us. Then the psalmist says, “Jehovah will keep your going out and your coming in from now and to eternity” (v. 8). The Lord even protects our walk, our going out and our coming in. The Lord gives us all the protection we need to keep us for His testimony.

Our Vision of the Lord Causes Us to Trust in Him

We surely have a marvelous Lord, who keeps us in every way for His economy. We can have such a strong and solid trust in Him. We trust in Him not only as our Creator but as the One who keeps us for His testimony. This is the second vision, the vision concerning the Lord. Now we begin to see a clear picture. As those who are ascending Mount Zion in our spiritual experience we must first see such a vision as described in these two psalms. We should all be able to say, “I see the world. It is full of lies and deceit. It is full

of vain and empty prosperity, and full of religious hypocrisy. I have nothing to do with this. But I also know my Lord. He will not let my foot slip back into the world. He is not only my Keeper but the Keeper of Israel. He keeps me not only for my sake but for the sake of His testimony. Because of this, all my trust is in Him.” May we all see such a vision. Praise the Lord!

**PSALM 122: THE VISION OF THE CHURCH
AS GOD’S TESTIMONY—
A PLACE OF JUDGMENT AND PEACE**

**The Vision of the Church
Can Only Follow the Previous Visions**

Psalm 122 shows us a vision of the church, the Body of Christ. We need to see this vision as we continue our ascent. We must realize that the vision of the church can only come after the vision of the world. If we do not see through the world, we cannot fully see the church. Furthermore, the vision of the church follows the vision of the Lord. If we have never seen who the Lord is and what He is for, then we will not know how to properly treasure the church life.

Healthy Fellowship Brings Us to the Church

Psalm 122 begins with a healthy fellowship: “I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go to the house of Jehovah” (v. 1). The ones who spoke to the psalmist did not talk about other things. Their fellowship was only concerning the house of Jehovah. Today, the Lord’s house is the church life. In our experience, the vision of the church life began with God’s grace. By God’s grace, out of God’s government, we were able to meet a few saints who really loved the Lord and who loved His testimony. When they came to us, their declaration was simply, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” This fellowship brought us into the church life.

We Are Separated from the World and Are Standing in the Church Life

The psalmist then says, “Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (v. 2). Jerusalem is a city that stands for God as His testimony. Formerly we stood outside of this city, meaning we were outside of God’s testimony. We may have seen through the world and we may have seen who the Lord was, but we still didn’t fully see what the Lord Himself was doing. Neither did we have any experience of His testimony. But then some saints told us to come to a church meeting, or a conference, or a gathering of a few saints. They said to us, “Let us go and enjoy the Lord in His house together!” Then we began to enjoy and experience the church life. Once we enjoyed the church life, a separation occurred. Our feet were not only being kept from the world, as in Psalm 121. Now our feet were in Jerusalem. “Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!” Formerly we were out, but now we were in! Formerly we had nothing to do with the church life, but now we came into the church life! Once we came into the church life, our feet were standing within the gates of Jerusalem. This means that we had truly left the world. We dropped the world and wanted nothing more to do with it. From that point on, we belonged to the Lord. We were now for the church life.

This is a sweet verse. We should learn to declare this. “Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (v. 2). If we have experienced the church life we will taste the richness of this verse. Those who do not know the church life could never enjoy such a verse. It means nothing to them. But after coming into the church life this verse has such a good taste. When we enjoy this verse we realize, “From now on there is a separation! I have left the world! I gave up the world! I belong to the church! I belong to the church life! O, Jerusalem!” This makes us so happy! The church life is a joyful life. We should enjoy that our feet are standing within the gates of Jerusalem. We should all declare, “Now I see the church! Now I enjoy the church life! Now I enjoy all the saints! Now I enjoy God’s purpose! Now I am different! O, Jerusalem! O,

church life!” In the church life we should have a lot of declaring and shouting like this. Praise the Lord, we stand within the gates of the church life! This is marvelous!

The Testimony is Built on the Experiences of Christ Compacted Together

The next verse in this psalm says, “Jerusalem has been built as a city that has been compacted together” (v. 3). This verse is hard to understand because it is related to the geography of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is built upon five hills. The number five in the Bible signifies the bearing of responsibility. “Five” is equal to “four” plus “one,” with “four” being the number of man as God’s creature and “one” being the number of God as the Creator. The number five signifies that God and man are operating and standing together to bear responsibility.

In the church life, in Jerusalem, the hills are compacted together. There are actually many “hills” in the church life. There are many saints with large amounts of Christ and with many experiences of the Lord. Yet all of the hills are compacted together. This means that not one brother exalts himself for his own gain. No one in the church life exalts in his or her own attainment. In the church life all the saints are for one goal, which is God’s purpose. The saints only care for God’s economy. There are many “hills” in the church life. There are many saints with a lot of experiences, but there is only one reality. Because all of the hills are compacted together, there is no place for anything else to come in. Praise the Lord for all the mature ones, who are compacted together to stand for God’s testimony.

All of the Saints “Go Up” for the Lord’s Testimony

Then the psalm continues, “To which the tribes go up, the tribes of Jehovah – a custom [or *testimony*] for Israel – to give thanks to the name of Jehovah” (v. 4). All of the tribes go up unto the testimony of Israel. All of the tribes mean all of the saints, from all of

the localities. They go up to establish, build up, and display God's testimony. The world only "goes up" for self-gain. Everyone in the world goes up to try to gain something for themselves. But in the church life, all the tribes go up for the sake of the Lord's testimony. They go up to give thanks to the name of the Lord. In the church life, there is nothing else to "go up" for. There is only the Lord Himself. In the church life we don't exalt ourselves. We only exalt Christ. When we all go up and exalt Him, it becomes His testimony.

In the church life we don't care for any other topics. We only have one focus. In the church life we only care for God's testimony. When we really care for God's testimony, then there is nothing to gain, or attain, or achieve for ourselves. There is no such thing as "I gained," "I attained," or even "I failed." All such considerations become nothing in the church life. Our only concern is, "What is the best for the Lord's testimony?"

In this psalm there is a progression. Verse one tells us that we are in fellowship. Verse two tells us we are taking a stand. Verse three tells us we are built up together. Then verse four tells us that out of this building God Himself is exalted. We are here coming together as the Lord's testimony. No "self" is here. Only Christ, and the purpose of Christ, are here. This psalm presents such a joyful and prevailing picture of the church life.

In The Church Life We Experience the Thrones of Judgment

The psalmist then tells us, "For there thrones are set for judgment, thrones of the house of David" (v. 5). It is easier to enjoy the first four verses of this psalm than verse five, because those verses are so sweet. After declaring that we are in the Lord's testimony to which all the tribes go up, why would the psalmist bring in something of judgment? It seems that the church life is too sweet to have judgment. Yet here it tells us, not only are we built up together to bear the Lord's testimony, but within this testimony there are thrones set for judgment. We should realize that the more we are in

the church life then the more we experience judgment. The more we are in the church life then the more the church life judges us. In the world, for everything we do, we have a good reason. But in the church life it seems that everything we do by our self becomes wrong. Everything we do by our self is under judgment. When we were in the world we could justify everything we did, even the things which were false by nature. We could always find a reason to justify ourselves. But once we came into the church life, the church life became a judging life.

Those who are in the church life live under judgment. There is not only one throne, there are “thrones set for judgment.” There are multiple thrones. It seems that many brothers and sisters in our experience our nothing but judgment to us. This doesn’t necessarily mean that they come to us and tell us we are wrong. They themselves are thrones of judgment. When we are with them we sense a shining, and we realize, “Oh Lord Jesus, I am so short.” For this reason we should give ourselves to be with those who are spiritually more mature than we are. When we are with mature saints they may not always be pleasant to us. They may be very frank with us. Sometimes they may not say much, yet as we are with them we experience judgment. Even when they are silent, in their presence there is a judgment. We begin to realize that something is wrong. We realize that something is wrong with our person, with our desire, or with our exercise. We realize that something is not so healthy about our involvement in the church life or the serving life. In the Lord’s testimony there are many such thrones of judgment.

The best meetings in the church life are those that nourish us the most. Yet at the same time, the most nourishing meeting is often where we experience the most judgment. Sometimes when we are meeting with the saints and are so filled with Christ, we realize, “Lord, forgive me. Forgive me. Cover me with Your blood.” Before the meeting we may have felt that we were very good. We even came prevailing and joyful. But after a rich enjoyment of the Lord with the saints, we have the feeling, “Oh Lord, have mercy. Have mercy. I need You.” Again, often this sense of judgment

comes from just being around certain saints in the church life. Their person, their presence, exposes us. If we have never experienced this, it actually means we are not so healthy. If we are healthy, then we will be judged.

When I was young, I was really on fire for the Lord. I was never at ease. It seemed day and night I was struggling and fighting for the Lord. I was one of a group of brothers who were high school seniors in the church. Entrance exams to the universities were very difficult, and so one day I said something wild. I said, “I love the Lord so much! I have given so much to the Lord! Out of His righteousness, He must get me into a good university!” These were like wild words from a beast’s mouth. Just at the very moment I was making this declaration, an elder walked by and looked at me. I can never forget the way he looked at me. Just from that one look, I wondered, “What am I doing? What can I say? How should I repent?” I was scared. I was not scared of the brother; I was scared before the Lord. I said to the Lord, “Lord, is this really me? Am I that impure? When I give myself to You, do I have something hidden in my heart that You must pay me back? Do I really think that You must bless me because of my service to You?” There was such a judgment. When that judgment came, it brought my whole person into repentance.

Without Judgment There Will Be No Testimony

The more the church life is healthy, the more judgment we will experience. It is when the church life becomes weak that there is little judgment among us. Instead, there are opinions and unnecessary talk. There is self-vindication, complaining, excuses, and many other things. That means there is no judgment. When there is no judgment, then there is no building or testimony among us. In this psalm, we firstly came into the church life and gave ourselves to the church life. After we gave ourselves, we were built up into the church life. By being built up, we became the testimony of the Lord. It is when we are experiencing the church life in such a high way that the judgment comes in. If we are lacking this judgment

then we will begin to lose those previous experiences. When there is no judgment eventually there is no separation from the world, no consecration to the church, no being built up with other saints, and no testimony of the Lord. This is why, in our experience, we must allow ourselves to be judged in the church life.

We should be thankful that the church life is not a “sugar-coated” life. The church life is a life of judgment. The more we love the Lord and give ourselves to the Lord in the church life, the more we will be thoroughly judged. We will realize, “Lord, I need Your mercy.” Before we came to the church we may have had a high regard for ourselves. But the more we follow the Lord, the more the judgment comes. Sometimes an elder’s presence is a judgment. Sometimes an older brother’s presence is a judgment. We see an older brother and don’t even know why we are scared. It doesn’t mean that we are caught in some sin. The brother may not have any feeling that his presence is judging us. But for some reason that brother just makes us realize we are off. We experience the throne of judgment, and we realize we need the Lord’s mercy.

This is what makes the church life so precious. Why? Because it is full of judgment. Before we loved the Lord and came to the church life we could always have our way. Once we came into the church life, our way disappeared. Whenever we want to do something our own way there’s a judgment. For this reason we should appreciate this verse. This verse shows there is an advancing, an elevating, an ascent in our experience. The thrones of judgment in this verse are part of the church life. When there is a healthy church life, there is a healthy judgment. The stronger the church life, the stronger the judgment.

Judgment Issues in Three Positive Items

Usually judgment is related to condemnation. In a court of law, for example, after a judgment there is a sentencing, which is a kind of condemnation. But the judgment described in this psalm does not issue in condemnation. Instead it issues in three precious and positive items. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Those who love

you will prosper” (v. 6). Firstly, this judgment issues in peace. Secondly, it issues in love. Thirdly, it issues in prosperity. All of these precious items come out of judgment.

Individually and Corporately, Peace Comes Out of Judgment

The first item that follows judgment is peace. How can the church life be in peace? It can only be in peace when the church life is a life of judgment. The more judgment we experience, the more peace we will have. If we don't have any judgment then we will be filled with our own opinions and ways. This is just who we are. All of us are wild. Wherever we go we are filled with opinions, and whenever there are opinions there can be no peace. Peace can only come when judgment is there. For example, three brothers may have three different opinions about the carpet in the meeting hall. One brother thinks, “The carpet should be red, for redemption.” The second brother thinks, “The carpet should be white, because we are washed white as snow.” The third brother thinks, “The carpet should be purple, a royal color.” But suppose one of these brothers comes into the meeting hall and is about to voice his opinion about the carpet. Just as he is about to open his mouth, he sees an elder. Then judgment comes. The brother tells himself, “Just be quiet. Everything is fine.” He will drop his opinion. This shows us that judgment is the source of peace.

This is true of us individually and corporately. Peace comes out of judgment. If we have struggling, strife, anxiety, and unrest in our personal lives, if we are confronting a lot of hardship and difficult decisions, then we should come to the Lord in the church life for judgment. We should not just come for the enjoyment of the Lord's presence. We should come so that we may let ourselves be judged by the Spirit through the meetings and through the saints. Once judgment comes, peace comes. Once judgment comes, rest comes. Then we realize, “There are no more frustrations.” The more judgment we experience in the church life, the more peaceful we become.

Peace is for the Building Up of the Church

When the Lord's grace is applied to us in the church life it is often through judgment. The more we are judged, the more we enjoy His grace. This causes us to be peaceful. Judgment brings in the peace. The more the church is judged, the more the church is peaceful. This is what builds up the Body of Christ. The more the saints are judged, the more they can be built up together. Out of judgment the church has the reality of being built up. Judgment does not bring us under condemnation, but grants us grace and peace that we may be built up together into His testimony.

We have seen that verse six says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." This means to pray for the peace of our local church. When a local church has thrones of judgment, then in that church peace will be there. Opinions and unhealthy things come into the church life only when judgment is not there. We should love judgment. This is not judgment to bring in condemnation, but judgment to bring in peace and building up. We should even pray, "Lord, judge me through the church life. Lord, judge me through the saints and through the leading ones. Judge me through the experiences of life and the enjoyment of the riches. Judge me through the meetings and the gatherings of the church. In my local church life, may You set the thrones of judgment!" Then the real peace will come in.

Judgment Brings in Love and Prosperity

Judgment not only brings in peace, but love and prosperity. Verse six continues, "Those who love you will prosper." In our experience, when we love the Lord we also love the saints. Out of our love we will enjoy prosperity. Prosperity is a matter of life. The more we are flourishing in life, the more we are prosperous. The thrones of judgment in verse five lead to these three precious items. We experience the building in peace, the love for the Lord and for all the saints, and the prosperous riches of life. The psalmist continues, "Peace be within your bulwarks, and prosperity within your citadels" (v. 7). Within the church, there is peace for building. Within

Christ, there is prosperity in life for us to grow. Praise the Lord, now we are growing in the church life.

**This Vision Causes Us to Seek
the Goodness of the Church Life**

Psalm 122 concludes, “For my brothers’ and companions’ sake I will now say, Peace be within you. For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God I will seek your good” (vv. 8-9). Once we have seen the church we say, “I will seek your good.” “Your good” refers to the goodness of the church. It means that we declare, “Now I see the church. From now on I will be for nothing else but for the church life.”

This psalm is a marvelous picture of the church life. First, there is the enjoyment of fellowship. Second, there is separation from the world. Third, there is the building up of the Body. Fourth, there is a testimony unto the Lord. Fifth, there is judgment for us. This judgment issues in peace, love, and prosperity in life for us to be built up with all the saints. This psalm surely gives us a clear vision. This vision will cause us to declare, “Peace be within you! I will seek your good! I will seek the goodness of the church life!” We have seen a vision of the world, a vision of the Lord, and a vision of the wonderful church life. Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER TWO

PSALMS 123-125—THE STAGE OF CONSECRATION

OUR THREE-FOLD VISION LEADS US TO A THREE-FOLD CONSECRATION

To follow the Lord we must have a three-fold vision: a vision of the world, a vision of the Lord, and a vision of the church. We have seen these three visions in the first three Psalms of Ascent. Psalm 120 showed us the world in all its falsehood, deceitfulness, and vanity. Then Psalm 121 gave us a vision of the Lord. At the beginning of that psalm the writer was looking towards the Lord as the Creator of heaven and earth. Eventually he realized that the Lord was the One who kept him for the sake of His own testimony. In Psalm 122 there was the third vision, the vision of the church. For the church to be the Lord's testimony we must experience judgment, but judgment leads to peace, love, and prosperity. These three visions will cause us to advance in our Christian life. Once our heart is clear about the world, the Lord, and the church life, we will be brought on to the next stage, the stage of consecration. This stage is pictured in the next three Psalms of Ascent.

Psalms 123-125 show us a three-fold consecration based upon our three-fold vision. Firstly, because we see who the Lord is, we consecrate ourselves to the Lord Himself (Psalm 123). Secondly, because we realize the true nature of the world, we consecrate ourselves to be separated and apart from the world (Psalm 124). Thirdly, after we see the church, we consecrate ourselves to the

Lord's trustworthiness (Psalm 125). We might think that the third consecration should be to the church life, but we will see that our response to a vision of the church is to consecrate ourselves to the Lord's trustworthiness. When the church life is clearly unveiled to us we realize that it is impossible for us to make it through. Therefore we give ourselves to the Lord's trustworthiness and faithfulness so that we would remain in the church life as His testimony.

These three psalms show us how to "go up," how to ascend in our spiritual experience. We go up by a proper response to what the Lord has unveiled to us. When the Lord unveils who He is to us, we respond by saying, "Lord, I give myself to You." When the Lord unveils to us what the world is, then we say, "Lord, I want to be separated from the world." When the Lord unveils to us the marvelous church life, then we say, "Lord, I give myself to Your trustworthiness." The most difficult aspect of these three visions is the church life. No one can go through the church life, and there is no life more discouraging than the church life. However, when we come to Psalm 125 we will see that all the problems in the church life are not with others, but with ourselves. It is we ourselves who are the source of all the problems, so eventually all we can say is, "Lord, I give myself to Your trustworthiness."

**PSALM 123: CONSECRATION TO THE LORD HIMSELF—
EXPERIENCING THE LORD'S HAND**

Taking Care of our Person to Appreciate these Psalms

Psalm 123 is written in a fine and delicate manner. For us to appreciate the delicacy of this psalm, and indeed all of these psalms, we cannot be a rough or crude person. It is difficult for a rough person to grasp what is spoken of here. When coming to these three psalms we must exercise to be tender, delicate, and fine in our person so that we may enjoy and appreciate all of the precious details.

The Resurrected and Ascended Lord is on the Throne

Psalm 123 begins, “To You do I lift up my eyes, You who sit enthroned in heaven” (v. 1). This shows the psalmist has grown in his spiritual experience. In Psalm 121 the psalmist said, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come?” Originally the writer was looking up to the hills for help from the Lord. Now in Psalm 123 he is looking up to the Lord Himself. Who is the Lord? He is the One who sits enthroned in heaven. He is the resurrected and ascended One, the One who is the government of the universe. He is in ascension and administration. Therefore the psalmist says, “To You do I lift up my eyes, You who sit enthroned in heaven.”

Being Consecrated by Paying Our Attention To The Lord’s Hand

The psalmist continues, “Behold, as the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a servant girl look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to Jehovah our God, until He is gracious to us.” This verse is very touching, but it is difficult to expound. The psalmist says, “Lord, here I am. I am looking unto You. I am just like a servant who looks to the hand of his master, and a servant girl who looks to the hand of her mistress. I am the same. My eyes are on You. You are the Lord, my God.” For us to “look to the hand” means to pay our full attention to a person. In some earlier cultures, especially Eastern ones, the lives of the servants were in the hands of their masters. Their masters even had the right to tell them whether they would live or die. Because of this, the servants were completely and utterly attentive to their “masters’ hands.” They were attentive to every need of their masters’ person.

We can see this today only to a much lesser degree. For example, waiters and waitresses who work in a high-class restaurant have a special kind of awareness. As those who are serving their customers they are attentive to the “hands of their masters.” If you

go to a high-class restaurant the waiter is very attentive to your hand. After the waiter brings you to your table and gives you your menu he seems to disappear. Actually he is very aware of you. As soon as you put down your menu he appears to take your order. When you finish your meal he immediately comes to ask you if there is something else you would like. Good waiters and waitresses notice you the moment you raise your hand to catch their attention. They serve you by being so sensitive to your hand, because your hand just represents yourself. Those who serve in a good restaurant are constantly aware of the “hands of their masters.” They are attentive to every move and every action of the customers they serve. This is actually a vivid picture of consecration.

Psalm 123 shows us that we who love the Lord in the church life are actually “servants” and “maidens” of the Lord. We are those who pay attention to the Lord’s hand. This is true consecration. Our consecration to the Lord should not merely be in a prayerful or theoretical way. We should consecrate ourselves practically to the Lord in our actions and behavior. This means we are like a good waiter or waitress who is fully aware of their customer’s every move. We should not tell the Lord, “Lord, I give myself to You,” and then go back to live our own life and take care of our own things. Once we tell the Lord, “I give myself to you,” then our whole person is focused on paying attention to the Lord Himself. We are utterly aware of our “master’s hand.” We are focused on all of His dealings and actions. This is the reality of consecration. It is not a theory or a slogan, nor is it merely a proper position. When a person has the reality of consecration it means that they are fully attentive to the actions of the Lord Himself. If we are truly consecrated, then however the Lord leads and whatever the Lord does, we are those who have the proper response to Him. As the “servants” and “maidens” of the Lord we must learn to be so attentive to “the hand of our master.”

What is the Lord’s hand in our experience? It may be a thought or an idea that suddenly comes, or it may be something that happens in our environment. At that moment we have the deep inward realization, “This is the Lord. This is not of man. It is the Lord.” We

should have numerous experiences of this. There should be many times when we go through something and realize, “This is Christ. This is not just an environment. This is not just a coincidence. This is not something that simply happened. The Lord is here. This is His hand.”

This psalm gives us a vivid picture of what it is to be consecrated. When the Lord’s hand moves, or when His hand is upon us, we have the proper response. In this psalm we first give ourselves to Christ by lifting up our eyes to see Him enthroned in the heavens. When we see Him this way, it is like a servant looking to the hand of his master and a maidservant looking to the hand of her mistress. As consecrated ones we are those who look upon Christ. We are waiting on Him. We are watching for the movement of His hand.

**The Lord’s Hand of Supply and Support:
For Us to Receive His Provision and Arrangement**

In the Bible there are at least four different ways to experience the Lord’s hand. Firstly, the Lord’s hand is a hand of supply. Whenever we look unto Him we receive the life-supply. His hand is also a hand of support. Support is needed when we are not able to receive the supply. The Lord is very merciful. When we are not able to receive His life-supply, then His hand will come in to support us. When we are able to receive His supply, then His hand supplies us with everything we need. He not only supplies us with life, but also with the proper church life, the best companions, and the best environment. All of these items are out of His hand. He also supplies us with all our inward needs. He supplies us with life, light, strength, and enjoyment. The Lord’s hand is a hand of supply that meets all of our needs.

Many times, however, we are not able to receive the Lord’s provision. For example, when we are younger the Lord will supply us with the best university, but we may think that we know better than Him. We would say, “That is not the university I desire.” The Lord always knows what is best for us, but we don’t always know

how to receive it from His hand. Many times the Lord supplies us, but we refuse His supply. Then His hand of supply becomes a hand of support to us. For instance, when I was younger the Lord provided a good university for me, but I wanted to go somewhere else. The university the Lord provided for me was not prestigious. Eventually I went, but there was bitterness within me. I complained to the Lord that I was not happy. But then there was a support. The Lord was there, and His hand was there. He seemed to be saying, "Look at Me. I am with you. I arranged for you to come here." At that time I had the full realization that it was of the Lord. I had no desire to leave. The university began to appear very differently to me. It actually became quite beautiful. This was because I continued to look to the Lord, and His hand of supply became a hand of support until I could receive His provision.

The Lord is a Lord of supply, and He is also a Lord of support. The Lord does everything to supply us, but we don't always know how to take His grace and enjoy His provision. Instead we often argue with Him. We ask, "Lord, why me?" The Lord supplies the best for us, but we complain. At such times the Lord's hand becomes a hand of support. This is surely precious. When we refuse to take His supply, then His hand of support will come. The only thing we must do is continue to look at Him. Our concept is, "Now that I have consecrated myself to the Lord, I will overcome!" But the Lord's divine concept is, "Now that you have consecrated yourself, you must keep your eyes upon Me. When you come to Me, I will give you My very life supply. However, you are still going to make many mistakes, and there will be times when you won't accept My arrangement or My provision for you. But don't worry. Even when you cannot take it, still look unto My hand. Still look unto Me. Still come to Me. I will give you the support you need to receive My arrangement and My supply."

**THE LORD'S HAND OF LEADING:
FOR US TO BE PURPOSEFUL**

The Lord's hand is also a hand of leading. As He supplies and supports us, He also leads us. Every time we are clear about the Lord's leading our life is very purposeful. But when the Lord's leading is not clear to us then we wonder what we are living for. All kinds of questions come in. It is when the leading is not clear to us that we struggle. Everything becomes frustrating. However, even then the supply is still there. When we can't handle our situation, the supply becomes support. Even though we are not so sure what is right, we still survive. We still go to meetings, because the Lord's hand is supporting us and supplying us. However, as we enjoy His support and supply, the leading of the Lord should become clear. Once the leading becomes clear, nothing is difficult. When the leading becomes clear everything we do becomes purposeful.

For example, we may consider whether we should serve the Lord full-time or not. Because we are not clear, we struggle in our consideration. Finally we ask the elders what they think. Suppose they say "no," and we realize that their "no" is the leading of the Lord. We may try to complain to the Lord about the elders, but He will stop us. We may be frustrated, but by His support and supply we learn to take the practical leading of the Lord through the elders. Then we find that our life becomes purposeful. This is a great blessing.

The Lord's Hand of Comfort: For Us to Obey His Leading

Out of the Lord's leading, there is comfort. The Lord's hand becomes a comfort to us. For example, if we desire to serve the Lord full-time, but the brothers tell us to get a job, we may need comfort. This is also the case if we would like to work, but the Lord is leading us to serve Him full-time. As His leading becomes clear and we become so purposeful, the Lord comforts us. He tells us, "I am with you." The same hand that leads us also becomes a comfort to us as we obey His leading.

**The Lord's Hand of Discipline:
For Us to Depend on His Mercy**

The Lord's hand is also a hand of discipline. This is actually most precious and more significant than His support, supply, leading and comfort. The most crucial purpose of the Lord's hand is to discipline us. This is why the psalmist says, "Our eyes look to Jehovah our God, until He is gracious to us." Other translations say, "Until He has mercy upon us." At what point do we need mercy in our experience? We understand that mercy means the Lord reaches us in our low condition, even where grace cannot reach us. When we are far off from Him, the Lord still reaches us by His mercy. But when we experience the Lord's mercy, what do we really experience? We actually experience His discipline. When we realize that we are far off from the Lord, by His mercy we repent and come back to Him. In the process we experience something of the Lord's discipline.

Many times, however, we may not be far off from the Lord, but He still comes in to discipline us. In fact, the more we love the Lord and give ourselves to Him, the more we experience His discipline. And the more we are disciplined by the Lord, the more we cry out, "Lord, I need Your mercy." By His mercy we are brought through the disciplinary process. Furthermore, when we ask the Lord for mercy we also receive His supply, His support, His leading, and His comfort. All of these come out of the Lord's disciplinary hand.

Even though the experience of discipline can be hard, this verse is so joyful. "Behold, as the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a servant girl look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to Jehovah our God, until He is gracious to us." When we have a proper consecration before the Lord we begin to realize, "Lord, with You as my Master I am not so free anymore. I cannot run wild. I cannot do whatever I want to do. All I can do is keep my eyes on Your hand." This is very different from being a "professional consecrator." A "professional consecrator" prays all the time, "Lord, I give myself to You," but he always lives his own life and does his own thing. We must desire to have the

reality of consecration, especially in our behavior. This means we must pray, “Lord, I am willing for my whole life to be disciplined by You. I look unto Your hand, and I look to You for Your mercy.”

After we see the vision of the Lord, we give ourselves to Him. What is the first thing the Lord has to do with us once we have given ourselves to Him? The first thing He must do is to discipline us. All of us are wild and lawless by nature. In a very real sense, we are untamable. Sometimes it seems that the Lord has no way to tame us because of who we are. Yet often we are proud of this. We sometimes boast to ourselves, “Look at how raw and wild I am! I struggle with the Lord all the time! It is so hard for Him to subdue me!” Then the Lord replies to us, “Look unto My hand. Give yourself to Me.” If we don’t give ourselves to the Lord, if we don’t look unto the Lord’s hand, then His discipline will not profit us. Every time He comes in to discipline us we won’t recognize it. We will just cry out, “It’s not fair! I’m so unfortunate!” But if we look to the Lord’s hand, then even when He does just a little disciplinary work we will realize, “This is from the Lord.” We will realize it is the Lord’s hand, and we will know how to cry out for mercy. Then the discipline will be profitable. He will not only provide us with mercy but with the supply, the support, the leading, and the comfort that we need. It is this process of being disciplined and receiving the Lord’s mercy that gives us the experience of transformation.

The Lord’s Discipline Brings Us into a Situation of Contempt

The psalmist continues, “Be gracious to us, O Jehovah, be gracious to us; for we are greatly filled with contempt” (v. 3). This verse is very interesting. When we love the Lord, the Lord disciplines us. When the Lord disciplines us, we are brought into a situation of contempt. We become what seems to be an unfortunate and unlucky person. It seems that everyone else is doing fine, but we are in a contemptible situation. For example, there is a young brother among us who graduated as valedictorian from a large high

school. But when he applied to the local university to get a scholarship, they turned him down. They were so foolish, turning down a student with such great potential. Yet actually the Lord was using this university to discipline that dear brother. This was something of the Lord's hand. When the brother graduated from high school at the top of his class, surely he was proud. He expected a scholarship from the local university. Meanwhile, all of his friends were receiving scholarships from one school after another, and this brother alone was rejected. He was in a situation of contempt.

When we don't love the Lord, people respect us. Once we love the Lord, nothing goes smoothly. Isn't this our experience? Before we love the Lord, we can be a "star." Once we love the Lord, we are under everyone's feet. This is why the psalmist says, "Be gracious to us, O Jehovah, be gracious to us; for we are greatly filled with contempt." People despise us. Why? Because we are looking at the Lord's hand. The Lord's disciplinary hand is upon us. We experience many things that no one else understands. This brother who graduated from high school was under the Lord's hand. Which one of his friends could understand him? What if this brother were to say to his friends, "You got a scholarship, but I got the life-supply. I got the support, the leading, and the comfort from the Lord." His friends would say, "You must be joking! We each got ten thousand dollars! How much did you get? How will you pay your tuition?" This is to be greatly filled with contempt. What can this brother do in such a situation? He can only pray, "Lord, be gracious to me. I need Your mercy."

To cry out for mercy is a blessing. When we think that we are doing well it is usually not so healthy. If we think, "I don't need mercy. I am doing fine," then we should be careful. But when we are in a situation of contempt, then we cry out, "Lord, have mercy. Be gracious to me." Suppose a brother is serving the Lord full-time. He may feel that he is very prevailing, so the Lord arranges for him to run into some of his old classmates. They ask him, "What are you doing now?" The brother thinks to himself, "What should I say? I can't say I'm a pastor. I can't say I'm a minister." Eventually he says, "Well, I'm ... serving the Lord full-time." They say,

“What? What does that mean? What is it that you do?” The brother doesn’t know what to say. He can’t say that he is jobless. He knows he is very busy, but he doesn’t have any words to portray his commitment. He stammers out something, but he knows he can’t possibly convey what he is doing with his life. The more he tries to explain, the more his friends look down at him. Suppose the brother says, “I am just a servant of the Lord.” His friends then say, “What Lord? What do you mean?” “The Lord Jesus Christ.” “Oh, you are a Christian. Where do you go to church?” Again the brother has no way to answer or explain. This is to experience contempt. When we go through such experiences all we can do is cry out for the Lord’s mercy.

When we follow the Lord, we have to prepare ourselves to be in contempt. People will look at us and ask, “What are you doing with your life?” This is the Lord’s disciplinary hand. Sometimes our parents would say to us, “You have a college degree, but you are wasting your life. When are you going to do something useful?” Then all we can do is tell the Lord, “Lord, have mercy upon me. Be gracious to me. I am greatly filled with contempt.” This is to know the Lord’s hand. When the Lord’s hand of discipline is upon us we often become contemptible in the world’s eyes. However, this should lead us to cry out to the Lord for His mercy. Then His hand will come in to supply us, support us, lead us, and comfort us. The more experiences we have of this, the better. The Lord’s hand of discipline keeps us dependent on His mercy.

**When We Love the Lord, the World
will Despise Us and Scorn Us**

The psalmist continues, “Our soul is greatly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud” (v. 4). Again, this is often the experience of those who serve the Lord full-time. Even working saints in the church life may look at full-timers and think, “These brothers don’t even know how to get a job. That is why I have to offer for their support every month!” This is a terrible thought, and we should never have such a spirit.

But when a brother becomes a full-timer, other people will treat him differently. If a brother gets a job, people will respect him. Even if it is not a high profession, people will respect him for holding a job. But when a brother says, “I am a servant of the Lord,” people will say, “What? What does that mean?” Then they may ask him, “What is your hobby?” The brother might reply, “I don’t really have one.” “What is it that you do with all your time?” “Well, I do a lot of practical serving. I go to meetings. I give myself to the church.” This is incomprehensible to the world. Of course, this is not only true of full-timers, but of all those who love the Lord. If you love the Lord, people in the world will think you are some kind of religious fanatic. You will be “greatly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud.”

Everyone on this earth is proud. In particular, when people do not have Christ they are proud. Even when they have nothing to be proud of, as long as they don’t have the Lord’s hand they will still be proud. But everyone who loves the Lord will be despised, regardless of who they are or what they do. When you love the Lord, people will scorn you. No matter how well you perform your responsibilities in the world, as long as you love the Lord you should be prepared for the “contempt of the proud.” When you don’t care about Christ, the world receives you. When you say, “I am for Christ,” contempt and scorn will come. Sometimes it almost seems unbearable. You may eventually decide that it is impossible to live in this world while being absolute for Christ. This is why we need the next psalm in our experience.

**PSALM 124: CONSECRATION TO BE SEPARATED
FROM THE WORLD – STANDING AGAINST
THE WORLD’S OPPOSITION**

The Lord is on Our Side for the Sake of His Testimony

Psalm 124 is actually a continuation of Psalm 123, but there is a key difference between them. The psalm begins, “If it had not been Jehovah who was on our side, Oh, let Israel say...” (v. 1).

The most important word in this verse is the word “Israel.” This marks a spiritual advancing, an ascent in our Christian experience. We advance from “I” to “Israel.” In Psalm 123, the psalmist said, “To You do I lift up my eyes.” The psalmist had an individual stand for the Lord, and this led to his experience of being despised in the world. On one hand, when we are despised because of our stand for the Lord, then the Lord is “on our side.” However, the Lord is not actually on the side of one person. As we see in Psalm 124, the Lord is on the side of Israel. “Israel” represents God’s chosen people who bear His testimony. As those who are bearing God’s testimony today we can boldly declare, “The Lord is on *our* side.” We have advanced from an individual stand for the Lord to a corporate stand for the Lord’s testimony.

The World Rises Up against Us in Three Ways

The psalmist continues, “If it had not been Jehovah who was on our side when men rose up against us” (v. 2). This thought is a continuation from the previous psalm. In Psalm 123 the world had nothing but contempt for us. In Psalm 124 the whole world rises up against us. The rest of Psalm 124 shows us the different ways that the world rises up. “Then they [the ones rising up] would have swallowed us up alive when their anger burned against us; then the waters would have washed us away; the stream would have passed over our soul; then the proud waters would have passed over our soul. Blessed be Jehovah, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped like a bird, out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped” (v. 3-7). First, the world comes like a beast to swallow us up quickly (v. 3). Next, the world tries to overwhelm us as a flood of waters (v. 4-5). Third, the world desires to ensnare us as a bird (v. 7). For the psalmist to characterize the world in such a way shows us that he was filled with experience. The description of the world in Psalm 124 is even stronger than in the previous psalm. Here we see three categories of the world’s opposition after we give ourselves to Christ. The world is like a beast to swallow us up, a flood to carry us away, and

a trap to ensnare us. We should never think that the world is lovely. The world is our enemy, and is always trying to defeat us in one of these three ways.

The World Comes as a Beast to Devour Us

The world first comes like a beast to swallow us up alive. This means that the world comes by force to scare us and threaten us. For example, the world often tells us, “You had better love me! If you do not love me, you will have no future! You will be hopeless!” Haven’t we all heard this voice? The world seeks to terrorize us. Sometimes the world speaks to us through our own family members. When members of our family are so worried about our future and so bothered that we are for the Lord, their words can cut deeply. This is how the world operates. It threatens us with noise. “If you do not love me, you will become nothing! If you give yourself to me, you can be so hopeful! You can be the president of a company!” The world lies to us: “If you give yourself to me, you can make a lot of money for the church! You can support the church!” Do not believe this. This is just the speaking of the beast which wants to swallow us up.

To be swallowed up means to disappear. Once we take the beast’s word, we will be gone. Once we follow the world we will disappear. There have been many dear brothers and sisters who loved the Lord but could not overcome the world’s voice. We must be aware. The world is always coming to us like a beast. “Give your life to me! I promise you everything!” This is the same as Satan’s promise to the Lord. Satan showed the Lord all the kingdoms of the world and said, “All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8-9). The principle is the same for us today. Satan comes as a beast ready to swallow us up and devour us. He comes by tempting us through the world.

The World Comes as a Flood to Overwhelm Us

Sometimes we can overcome the world when it comes to us as a beast. We can say, “I don’t care about the world! I am here for the church life! I am here for the Lord’s testimony!” But then the world comes in a different form, as a flood to overwhelm us. A beast is easier to handle because it is so obvious. A flood is more subtle than a beast and therefore much harder to resist. The first stages of a flood may even be quite pleasant. At first there may be just a pleasant sound of water flowing, but eventually it builds into an overwhelming flood. The psalmist says, “Then the waters would have washed us away; the stream would have passed over our soul” (v. 4). The word “stream” can also be translated “torrent.” A flood may start out very small. It may begin as just a stream, but gradually it turns into a torrent. The world may come to us with something small, but gradually it overwhelms us until we feel we have no choice but to give in.

Suppose you begin a new job. After a short time, it is your turn to be promoted. However, this promotion causes you to travel more. Eventually another promotion comes, and the only requirement is to work overtime. When these promotions first come, they are enjoyable. But these promotions can also be the beginning of a flood. You may think, “What is wrong with getting a promotion?” There may be nothing wrong. Sometimes a promotion can be very healthy. But promotions can also be very dangerous. Such things can carry you away like a flood until you are completely outside of God’s economy. Then all of a sudden you find yourself out of the church life. You are out of the Lord’s presence, and you don’t even know how you got there. You can remember one year earlier, how much you loved the Lord and the church life. Now you wonder why, just a year later, you are going to parties instead of church meetings.

How could this happen? Because the world came as a flood. At first the world came to you as a beast, but you recognized it. But then the world changed its form. It came as a flood without warning. It began with some very small and subtle changes in your life which built up over time. Then it eventually came so fast that it was

impossible to escape. For this reason the Bible warns us not to love the world nor the things in the world (1 John 2:15). The whole world is a flood that moves strongly and quickly. When we love the world or give into it only a little, we are in danger of being suddenly overwhelmed. Before we even know it the world will carry us away. This is why we must be careful.

The World Comes as a Snare to Trap Us

The world can also come as a snare. “Our soul has escaped like a bird, out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped” (v. 7). A snare is a trap which is filled with bait. When a bird goes after some bait and flies into a trap, it has no idea what it has gotten into. The bird doesn’t realize what danger it is in. We may go after some bait in the world, yet we don’t realize the seriousness of it. The bait of the world is quite attractive, but before we know it we can be trapped in a snare. We should never think, “I have been following the Lord for a long time now. I know how to handle the world.” No, we don’t know how to handle it. The world is still a snare that can trap us. There are so many things in the world that act as bait to us. We may have the purest motives, but we can still be ensnared. Once we touch it we don’t know what will happen next. Even when we look for a new job, that job can be filled with bait. A new job may include all sorts of promising things. Then we fly in like a bird, and before we know it we’re trapped in a snare. All of a sudden we don’t belong to the Lord anymore. We are no longer free.

The Lord Can Break the Snare of the World

But praise the Lord, He always has a way with us. Even when we become ensnared in the world, the Lord still has a way. The psalm tells us, “Blessed be Jehovah, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped like a bird, out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped” (v. 6-7). There are times when we are in danger of being caught by the

world, yet we are somehow able to fly away. We seem to be captured, yet somehow we escape. No matter how the world attracts us and ensnares us, the Lord always has a way to break the snare.

**Our Help to Overcome the World
is in the Name of the Lord**

When we first follow the Lord, then the world comes in to despise us. But when we are for His testimony, the world rises up against us. The world attacks us in three ways: as a beast to devour us, as a flood to overwhelm us, and as a trap to ensnare us. How can we escape the world? The psalmist declares, “Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth” (v. 8). This is the conclusion not only of this psalm but the previous one. Psalm 123 had no conclusion. It ended with our being despised by the world. Psalm 124 is the continuation of Psalm 123, and it ends with this wonderful verse. When the world despises us, threatens us or compels us, where does our help come from? The One who made heaven and earth. Praise the Lord, He helps us. Our help is in the name of the Lord. Because of His help we can escape and overcome the world. This is our second consecration. After our first consecration to the Lord Himself, we need the further consecration of being separated from the world so that we can be His testimony.

**PSALM 125: CONSECRATION TO THE LORD’S
TRUSTWORTHINESS—DEALING WITH OUR SELF-LIFE**

**The Lord is Trustworthy to Us
for the Sake of His Testimony**

Psalm 125 begins, “Those who trust in Jehovah are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever” (v. 1). The psalmist doesn’t say that those who trust in the Lord are “solid and immovable.” Instead he says they are “like Mount Zion,” which is the Lord’s testimony. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion.

They are His testimony which cannot be moved. This shows us that the Lord doesn't care for our own individual spirituality. He doesn't care so much for our being solid or strong in ourselves. The Lord's care for us is a matter of His testimony. Our consecration to the Lord's trustworthiness follows the high realization of how much He cares for His testimony.

When we are young in the Lord we may think, "The Lord is so trustworthy to me." But once we grow in the Lord we experience His trustworthiness for the sake of the church. In fact, it seems that as we grow the Lord stops being trustworthy to us individually and is instead only trustworthy to the church as His testimony. Concerning our own Christian life, we want to be so holy, yet we are so defeated. We want to be so victorious, yet we have so many failures. We want to read the Bible or pray all the time, yet we are constantly wasting our time. When it comes to ourselves, we are terrible. It seems that the Lord is not after our own personal spirituality. He may not even be so real to us as we pursue these things for ourselves. But when it comes to the church, He is so real! He is so trustworthy! Eventually we should have the realization, "The Lord is so trustworthy to the church! Why am I here? Because of the church! Why is the Lord so trustworthy to me? For the sake of the church!" None of us can say, "The Lord is so trustworthy to me because of who I am." The Lord is only so trustworthy because He cares for Mount Zion.

It is foolish for anyone to desire to be an overcoming Christian by themselves. If we desire to grow to spiritual maturity by ourselves, and for the sake of ourselves, then we are foolish. Not only are we foolish, but it is impossible anyway. This psalm shows us the proper understanding of the Lord's trustworthiness. When we realize that the Lord doesn't care for our own spirituality, but instead He cares for His testimony, it should free us from our self-centered Christian life. We will have a deeper consecration which deals with our self-life. Then we will joyfully declare to the Lord, "I don't care how spiritual I am! I don't care what condition I'm in! I don't care whether I am victorious or defeated! But Lord, I want to tell You, I love You and I love Your church! I give myself to Your

trustworthiness! I don't care for myself anymore! I only care for You and for Your testimony!" This is to consecrate ourselves to the Lord's trustworthiness. Then we are truly "like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever."

The Lord Surrounds Us and Protects Us as His Testimony

The psalmist continues, "Jerusalem – mountains surround her; and Jehovah surrounds His people from now and to eternity" (v. 2). The Lord is trustworthy first for Mount Zion's sake, and then for Jerusalem's sake. We have seen that Mount Zion is the Lord's testimony, but it is also the Lord's habitation. Strictly speaking the entire city of Jerusalem is the Lord's testimony. Mount Zion as the Lord's habitation gives Him satisfaction, while Jerusalem as the Lord's testimony declares and exalts His name.

The Lord's trustworthiness is like the mountains that surround Jerusalem. When we studied Psalm 122 we saw that Jerusalem was built upon five hills. From the south, as you go up to Jerusalem, it seems that Jerusalem is the high point. But once you arrive at Jerusalem you see that there are mountains surrounding the city. To the north, east, and west there are higher mountains around Jerusalem. This is a picture of our own experience. When we first see the church, we think, "This is the highest point. The church life is so high!" But once we come into the church life we find out that the Lord is surrounding us as His testimony. The Lord is protecting the church life like the high mountains around Jerusalem. He is our protection. He protects us for Jerusalem's sake. The more we enjoy and partake of the church life, and the more we give ourselves to the church life, the more we realize that we have a marvelous Christ who is protecting the place of His testimony.

The Church Life Affords Us the Highest Enjoyment of Christ

It is in the church life, in the testimony of the Lord, that we begin to realize what a marvelous Christ we have. When we try to

enjoy Christ on our own, for ourselves, we find out that He is very limited. It does not mean that He is not with us, but He can only be realized by our own small mentality. Because we have a small and selfish mind, we have a small Christ. But when we come into and enjoy the church life we realize, “He is not only my Christ, He is the Christ of all these dear brothers and sisters!” When we are in the church life we eventually come to know the Lord through the experiences of all the saints. Then the Christ of so many brothers and sisters becomes our Christ. We enjoy their Christ, and they enjoy our Christ. We enjoy the Christ of young people and old people, fine people and rough people. Christ becomes so great and so high in our experience. He becomes like the high mountains surrounding Jerusalem. This is a precious realization. We should love and appreciate the Christ we have in the church life. We should all declare, “Lord, we are so thankful that you have brought us here! We have such a rich, heavenly, bountiful, and glorious Christ, because we are in the church life!”

**In the Church Life We May Experience
the “Scepter of Wickedness,” but it Will Not Remain**

Then the psalmist continues, “For the scepter of wickedness will not rest upon the allotment of the righteous, that the righteous would not put forth their hands to iniquity” (v. 3). After showing us such a marvelous Christ in the church life the psalmist comes back to us. In the church life everything is wonderful, yet there is also something called “the scepter of wickedness.” Other translations say “the rod of the wicked.” Christ is marvelous, but people are wicked. We should apply this not only to people outside of the Lord’s testimony, but also to ourselves. Even we ourselves can be “the wicked.”

For example, in the midst of such a joyful church life we often beat our fellow saints. We can treat the saints so unfairly. This is to wield “the scepter of wickedness.” We all admit that we have shortcomings and limitations. We cause many problems in the church life, and to a certain degree we even damage the Lord’s testimony.

Sometimes when we are with certain saints we wield the scepter of wickedness. We don't even realize it, but it just happens. But although we have the scepter of wickedness we also have "the allotment of the righteous." In the church life the scepter may appear and even cause damage, but it doesn't remain. It "will not rest upon the allotment of the righteous." Hence, we should be comforted. The wickedness comes and goes, but the righteousness abides forever. The scepter is only temporary, but our allotment never changes.

Do we realize this about the church life? We are all here enjoying the allotment of the righteous. At the same time we often wield the scepter of wickedness. Who is the source of all the problems in the church life? We are. We are the ones who are so wicked. We are the ones who use that scepter. Many times we don't even realize that we are hurting the saints and damaging the church life. Yet when we do realize this, we should not worry. Because of the righteousness in the church life, the offenses and damage we cause will not remain. "The scepter of wickedness will not rest upon the allotment of the righteous." The verse goes on to tell us the reason: "That the righteous would not put forth their hands to iniquity." If the scepter were to remain, if the offense were to continue, even the righteous would be driven to iniquity. But praise the Lord, the scepter will not "rest." When we offend a brother, or when a brother offends us, it will not last. The experience of the scepter is temporary, but the enjoyment of our allotment is eternal.

**We Should Trust the Lord to Grow what is of Him
and Expose what is of Ourselves**

The next two verses show us more about who we are. First the psalmist says, "Do good, O Jehovah, to the good and those upright in their hearts" (v. 4). Within all of us there are two very different parts of our being. One part is "upright," because it is from Him. We can use this verse to tell the Lord, "Lord, whatever is from You, whatever is divine, whatever is eternal within me, do good to that part. May that part of me grow and come out more." Then the

psalmist continues, “But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, Jehovah will lead them off with the workers of iniquity” (v. 5a). This is a cry to the Lord. There is a second part of us that is crooked, that turns aside to crooked ways. When we see this we will say, “Lord, expose me more. All the things that are not so healthy, that are not upright, that are crooked in my heart, expose them more.”

We must remember that this psalm is one of consecration. The writer is a consecrated person. He knows that the Lord is trustworthy, so he is not afraid of being exposed. He would tell the Lord, “Lord, I trust You. Expose me more. Expose what is evil and terrible within me. Bring it to manifestation.” When we are not fully given to the Lord we are always trying to hide ourselves. We often try to make ourselves appear good. But when we really touch the Lord, we would say to Him, “Lord, expose me more. Enlighten me more. Shine on me more. Let me know my self more. Expose all my shortcomings. Save me from appreciating myself.” Why would we pray this way? So that we have a chance to repent. If we don’t trust the Lord we would never dare pray in this way. We would never dare ask the Lord to expose all our iniquities. It is only when we fully trust in the Lord that we can say, “Lord, I am ready. Whatever is of You and Your dispensing within me, bring it out. Whatever is upright within me, let it grow and develop. But Lord, whatever is evil within me, whatever turns to crooked ways, let it be manifested so that I can repent and deal with it.” This is the prayer of a consecrated person.

Dealing with Ourselves Brings Peace to the Church Life

After such a manifestation of what is upright and what is crooked within us, the psalm ends, “Peace be upon Israel” (v. 5b). Only when our self-life is exposed and dealt with can we have the reality of peace among us. The more we see who we are and deal with ourselves, the more peace there is in the church life. We all should pray this way. “Lord, whatever is of You, let it grow and develop.

Whatever is of me, let it be exposed and dealt with.” This prayer is not for ourselves, but for the church life as the Lord’s testimony. “Peace be upon Israel.” The feeling of this psalm is so single and pure. We are not here for ourselves, but for His testimony. We deal with our self-life so that the church can be built up in peace.

CONCLUSION

These three psalms show us a precious three-fold consecration. First, we consecrate to the Lord Himself. As those who love the Lord, we are as a servant looking to his master’s hand. We tell the Lord, “I give myself to You. I wait upon Your hand. In Your discipline I look to You for mercy.” Second, we consecrate to be separated from the world. We say to the Lord, “I love You so much. I reject the world. I reject the beast, the flood, and the snare. If I get caught in the world, Lord, help me to get out.” Third, we consecrate ourselves to the Lord’s trustworthiness. We pray, “Lord, You are so trustworthy. In the church life, You are so rich, so high, and so bountiful. You are just like the high mountains surrounding the hills of Jerusalem. Lord, I ask You to cause whatever is healthy and upright within me to grow and develop. At the same time, expose whatever is crooked and fleshly within me so that Your testimony can have peace.” These psalms portray someone who has seen a clear vision and has fully given himself to the Lord for His testimony. This is truly precious. May the Lord have mercy upon us that we would all enjoy such a consecration.

CHAPTER THREE

PSALMS 126-128—THE STAGE OF ENJOYMENT

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We have seen that the Psalms of Ascent are a picture of the Christian life. As we follow the Lord we “ascend” in our experience. These psalms form a progression which can be divided into five stages of three psalms each. The first stage shows us a clear vision concerning three things: the world, the Lord, and the church life. This three-fold vision issues in the second stage, the stage of consecration. In this stage we consecrate ourselves firstly to the Lord, secondly to be separated from the world, and thirdly to the Lord’s trustworthiness.

Our consecration to the Lord is also to His hand. The most important purpose of the Lord’s hand is to discipline us. His discipline leads us to experience His supply, support, leading, and comfort for our transformation. After this, we consecrate ourselves to be separated from the world. We realize that the world is actually operating to defeat us. It is like a beast to swallow us up, a flood to carry us away, and a snare to capture us. When we give ourselves to the Lord we have the ability to escape from the world. Then finally, because we see the church, we consecrate ourselves to the Lord’s trustworthiness.

Before we come to the next stage, we need to see something more about the third type of consecration. In our experience we have to admit that there are times when we lose the enjoyment of

the church life. The church life is more difficult than any other life on earth. Even in the world, things are comparatively simple. But the church life is a family life, and in a family life no one can hide anything. Everyone knows everyone else. Therefore, the church life can be very complicated. For example, my disposition may frustrate you, and your character may frustrate me. My aggressiveness may become a pressure to you, and your slowness may become a burden to me. Eventually if we do not know how to properly consecrate ourselves we will have no way to go on. As we have seen, we do not consecrate ourselves directly to the church life. Instead, we consecrate ourselves to the trustworthiness of the Lord.

As we trust ourselves to the Lord, we learn that He is able both to care for us and to expose us. Within each of us there are two completely different parts. The first part is upright and comes from the Lord's dispensing, and the second part is full of iniquity and comes from our fallen nature. Concerning the first part, we can trust the Lord to bring it out in full and cause it to prevail. Concerning the second part, we can trust the Lord to expose it in full so that it can be judged and dealt with. This is the healthy desire of a consecrated person. Because we trust the Lord, we can commit ourselves fully to Him. When we have such a complete consecration – first, to the Lord and to His hand; second, to be separated from the world; and third, to the Lord's trustworthiness – we can come to the next stage, the stage of enjoyment.

**PSALM 126: THE ENJOYMENT OF BEING FREED
FROM OUR SELF-LIFE**

Our Initial Enjoyment of Entering into the Church Life

Psalm 126 begins, “When Jehovah turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. At that time our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with a ringing shout. At that time they said among the nations, Jehovah has done great things for them. Jehovah has done great things for us; we are joyful” (v. 1-3).

The psalmist speaks of a joy that is impossible to describe. This is our experience when we first came into the church life. “When Jehovah turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like those that dream.” The turning of our captivity indicates that we were those searching and struggling, possibly for many years. Then one day our captivity was turned, and what we longed for became our reality. When this happened, all we could say was, “This is a dream come true!”

We may have realized for years that God desired a testimony and a habitation. We realized that God wanted to gain a group of people to belong to Himself alone. Yet we were in captivity, either in Christianity or in the world. But one day the Lord brought us to the local churches and we began to enjoy the church life. He “turned our captivity.” Then we were like those that dream. We beheld all the dear saints. We beheld all the riches of Christ. We found that we could serve the living God in reality. We had the full realization, “Oh, thank You Lord! You have turned the captivity of Zion! You have brought us to Your testimony! We are like those that dream!”

If you have never struggled for this, then there is no “dream” in your experience. You may attend meetings and even enjoy them, but within you there is no declaration, “This is just like a dream!” Instead you may only think, “This is a good group to be with.” But those who struggle, who fight, who labor, who cry out in their seeking, eventually enter into the reality of what they are fighting for. They can say, “I am in the church life! This is a dream come true!”

“At that time our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with a ringing shout” (v. 2a). Those who have entered into the church life after longing and seeking for it are filled with joy. There is no way they can describe it. All they can do is praise the Lord. This verse continues, “At that time they said among the nations, Jehovah has done great things for them.” When we enjoy the church life, even those in the world recognize that there is something different about us. Our joy is so great that even the world notices it. Eventually we can only say, “Jehovah has done great things for us; we are joyful” (v. 3). This is the conclusion of our initial enjoyment. Praise the Lord, we are so happy that we are in the church life!

We Need a Deeper Turn from Captivity

The psalmist then says, “Turn again, O Jehovah, our captivity like the streams in the south” (v. 4). The first part of the psalm describes our initial experience of the church life. Once we are in the church life, eventually we long for a deeper turn. There are mainly two possible interpretations of the phrase, “Turn again, O Jehovah, our captivity.” One interpretation is, “Lord, there are not enough people who belong to Your testimony. So many people are in captivity to the world and to Christianity. Lord, turn again! Turn many more people! Release them from their captivity! Bring them to Your testimony!”

The second interpretation of this verse is that it is talking about those who are already in the church life. It is speaking of ourselves. The psalmist says, “Turn again, O Jehovah, *our* captivity.” In other words, we ourselves need a deeper turn. To pray according to this understanding is to tell the Lord, “Lord, I already came out of captivity positionally. I am no longer in Babylon. I am no longer in the world or in Christianity. I have come to Your testimony, and my stand is clear. I am for Christ and the church. But, Lord, look at me. There are still so many things that I have, and so many things that I enjoy, that are far from You. Lord, I am still in captivity. Positionally I am released, but experientially I am not released in full. I still have not yet been freed. I still have so many things which capture me.” When we realize this, then we pray, “Lord, turn again my captivity.”

It is not enough for us to come into the church life positionally. Eventually we must realize, “Lord, there are many things within me that are still under captivity. I made a positional turn already when I came to the church life. Now I would like to have a dispositional turn. O Lord, turn me again!” This is a precious realization. Our initial enjoyment of the church life leads us to a higher and richer enjoyment, which requires a deeper turn. The more we enjoy the church life, then the more we realize that the Lord is urging us to be turned again from our captivity. He is waiting for us to pray, “Lord, turn me again! I turned once already! Now turn me again!”

As far as our position is concerned, we can testify that we are in a marvelous place. Here in the church we enjoy Christ, we enjoy the Body life, we enjoy the meetings and gatherings, we enjoy the ministry of the truth, we enjoy the fellowship among all the saints, we enjoy the flow of life, and we enjoy so many riches. When we first began to enjoy the church life we were like those that dream. We had no way to describe it. Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue was filled with a ringing shout. We declared, “Praise the Lord, I am in the church life!” But gradually we calmed down. Eventually we realized, “Oh Lord. So many things still capture me. On one hand I am released. Positionally I have returned from my captivity. On the other hand, I am still under so much captivity dispositionally. I am still captured by so many other things.” When we are still in captivity we are not free to follow or serve the Lord in full. We find ourselves limited in our ability to cooperate with Christ as the Builder of the church. When we realize this about ourselves we should pray, “Lord, turn again my captivity.”

Being Released from the Captivity of Our Self-life

There are many things that capture us. For example, in the church life there are many complaints. Sometimes saints complain that the elders are not burdened enough. They complain that the young ones are too wild. Then they complain that the church life is too unbalanced. It is too focused in one direction. Some saints may complain, “The gospel is strong among us, but we are short of the enjoyment of life.” Others may complain, “We have so much enjoyment of life, but we are short of preaching the gospel.” With all of these complaints and opinions, there is only one “antidote.” That antidote is to pray, “Turn again our captivity, O Lord.” Why do we complain about the church life? Because the practice of the church life is against our self. In this psalm it is not the world that captures us, it is our self-life. When we are still under the captivity of our self-life, then our exercise in the church life will be frustrated.

We all need to be released from our captivity to our self-life. In this captivity we lose our enjoyment of the Lord and the enjoyment

of the church life. Eventually we are not satisfied. If someone were to ask us, “Do you find the church life satisfying?” our answer would probably be, “Yes I do, *but...*” The “but” is a reflection on ourselves. It means, “Yes, the church life is satisfying, but I am still in captivity. I am captured especially by my self-life.” We should not point our finger at anyone else; we should point it at ourselves. This is why such a sweet and enjoyable psalm has this thought. At first when we are brought into the Lord’s testimony after striving and struggling, we are joyful. We are like those that dream. But then eventually we have a cry. “Lord, O Lord, turn *again* our captivity.” We long to be released from ourselves.

**Being Freed from our Self-life Seems Impossible,
but the Lord is Able**

This psalm tells us that our second turn from captivity is “like the streams in the south.” The thought here is quite deep. To the south of Israel there is nothing but desert. How can the psalmist expect to find streams in a desert? This seems impossible. The thought of the psalmist here is, “Lord, for You to turn my captivity in this way seems impossible. It is like ‘the streams in the south.’ Only You can do such a thing.” When we are young in the Lord, it is easy for us to say, “I have been terminated with Christ! I have been crucified!” But eventually after many years, we realize that for us to be truly crucified with the Lord seems impossible. It is like the streams of the south. In the desert, how can there be streams? Crying out to the Lord to deliver us from our self-life is like crying out for a stream in the desert. When we come to the matter of our self-life being terminated, when we come to the experience of being completely freed from ourselves, then we realize, “Lord, this is impossible.” It’s impossible, yet we trust the Lord to do it. We know that the Lord can save us. It is impossible, yet it is real. It is like “the streams in the south.”

This verse is so poetic, yet so realistic. We are all in an impossible situation. We all have the same nature. Everyone of us would agree, “I am such a difficult case. It is so hard for the Lord to know

how to handle me.” As we follow the Lord, eventually we realize that it is not Satan, it is not the world, and it is not so many other negative things that capture us. It is we ourselves who capture us. We are all under the captivity of our self-life. That is why we become desperate. We tell the Lord, “How can You save me? How can You release me? How can You free me from my self? This is impossible!” But even as we say it is impossible we have an inward realization: “Lord, You can do this. Turn again. Turn again my captivity.”

When we truly see our captivity to ourselves, we will pray desperately, “Lord, I am beyond rescue. I am so terrible and so corrupted that it seems hopeless. But Lord, I cry out to You! Turn again! You have done miracles before upon me. You have brought me out of captivity before. You brought me into the church life. That was impossible, but You did it for me. Now, Lord, do it again! Turn my captivity! This time it’s so much harder. This time my captivity is not something outward, but something inward. Lord, only You can do this! Turn again my captivity, as the streams in the south!” If we cry out to the Lord this way, then He will answer us. He will respond, “Yes, I will release you, but you must pay a price.”

The Price for Being Freed from Our Self-life: Sowing Ourselves unto Death

How does the Lord release us from our captivity? Psalm 126 continues, “Those who sow in tears will reap with a ringing shout” (v. 5). The Lord releases us from our captivity by asking us to pay a price. In this verse the Lord tells us, “Now that you desire to come out of your captivity, it is very simple. You just need to sow in tears.” We might ask, what does this mean? What is it that we sow? The Lord would say, “Go and sow *yourself*.” When we sow in tears it means that our self-life is over. We realize that we must sow our very selves into the ground to die. We no longer have any choice. We realize, “If I want to be delivered from my captivity to my self, then I must bury myself and die. That is my future. That is the only road ahead of me.”

Everyone who has such a realization will experience tears. Why? Because we have nothing left. There is nothing for us to do but go and die. When we sow ourselves, when we bury ourselves, then we are truly sowing in tears. This is fully in the context of the church life. Sowing in tears is the only way for the “dream” that we initially enjoyed to become reality. For the church to be built up, for the Lord’s testimony to be raised up, for God to gain His habitation, for there to be a group of people who bear His name, there is no other way. We must go, sow ourselves into the ground, and die. We must go and bury ourselves. When we realize this, tears come. We know that we are finished. There is no more hope for us. There is no more future for us. All we can do is sow ourselves into the ground and be buried there.

Before we come to this realization we may still make our own choices. For example, a young brother may decide for himself what college he will go to. He might think, “It depends on which department I get into, which one gives me a bigger scholarship, and which one is farther away from home.” But if this brother were to ask the Lord where he should go, the Lord would say, “There is only one college for you to attend: ‘death university.’ Dear young brother, you must learn to sow yourself. That is your only future. Which university should you go to? You should choose the university that is the best for sowing yourself into the ground for the sake of My testimony.”

We are all still filled with our own selections and choices. We need to realize, “If I want the dream I have seen to become reality then I must sow myself into the ground to die.” This means that we don’t have our own choice anymore. Instead, we take God’s choice and submit ourselves to His hand. This is a sober matter. Only people who live this way can build up the church and uphold the Lord’s testimony. It is not enough that we have turned from our original captivity to come into the church life. The Lord would say to all of us, “Turn again!” Our first turn was a positional turn. It only demanded the forsaking of outward things. Our second turn is a dispositional turn. It demands that we forsake ourselves. Whether we are in school, working a job, or serving the Lord full-time, we

must have one goal: to be sown into the ground to die. Everything else doesn't matter. We need to have a turn. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing, we need to say, "Lord, I am here to sow myself into the ground to die. I have no more choices or preferences. I have no other hope or expectation. I have no other future. I am only here as a seed to be buried."

**Sowing Ourselves into the Ground
will Cause Us to Be Fruitful**

The Lord Jesus was one who sowed Himself into the ground to die: "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). If we wish to be fruitful, then we also must go and die. Psalm 126 is very deep. First there is an initial enjoyment, but then there is a deeper consecration. In this consecration the Lord does not demand that we do anything. He only demands that we die. The Lord doesn't ask us to serve Him. Instead, He asks us to sow ourselves into the ground, just as He did. When we do this, the result is that we "reap with a ringing shout." Death and burial is not the end. When we sow ourselves into the ground, we will reap something. When we sow in tears, we will reap in joy! Praise the Lord for this!

The psalm continues, "He who goes forth and weeps, bearing seed for scattering, will no doubt come in with a ringing shout, bearing his sheaves with him" (v. 6). When the Lord tells us to go and die, and we respond, "Yes, Lord," then we become like precious seed. We are buried under the ground and out of sight. But then we bear much fruit. We return with joy, bearing our sheaves with us. Fruitfulness does not come by doing a lot of activities. We only become fruitful by falling into the ground to die. For us to be fruitful we must tell the Lord, "I am willing to die with You. I am willing to bury myself as a seed. I know that I will come back with sheaves, with bountiful fruit for Your enjoyment." Then the Lord enjoys the fruit, and we do also. This is much deeper than the enjoyment when we first came into the church. Now we have

been released from our self-life. Our captivity has been turned, just as “the streams in the south.” The streams that flow in the desert will cause barren land to become fruitful. When we are freed from our self, we also become fruitful. This is a higher enjoyment. After sowing in tears, we reap in joy.

PSALM 127: THE ENJOYMENT OF TRANSFORMATION

Stopping Our Vain Labor and Allowing the Lord to Give Us Rest

Psalm 127 was written by Solomon. It begins, “Unless Jehovah builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless Jehovah keeps the city, the guard watches in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to lie down late, to eat the bread of toil” (v. 1-2a). There are three things we all like to do once we love the Lord and enjoy the church life. Firstly, we like to build. Secondly, we like to keep watch. Thirdly, we like to labor. These are the three “attractions” for us in the church life. We enjoy the building, the watching, and the laboring. It is significant that this psalm was written by Solomon, because he was the one who built the Lord’s house. He says that unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. When we try to do many things to build up the Lord’s house, it doesn’t work. Furthermore, unless the Lord keeps the city, those who guard the city watch it in vain. Finally, it is vain for us to rise up early, to lie down late, and to eat the bread of toil. This means that it is vain for us to be so consumed with concern for the Lord’s interests. When we are overly burdened for the church life then our bread becomes the bread of toil. This sounds very good, but actually it is in vain. It is of no use.

Solomon then says, “All the same, He gives to His beloved while they sleep” (v. 2b). Other translations say that the Lord “gives sleep.” In other words, Solomon is saying, “Don’t you know that you are His beloved? You don’t need to labor so hard or be so consumed. Instead, you should just go to sleep. Don’t work so hard. Don’t do so much. The Lord wants you to rest.” In our hu-

man life we can work and be consumed for many days on end, but after just one good night of sleep we are completely refreshed. This is the Lord's desire for us. Because we are His beloved He wants to give us rest.

In the church life, the Lord would tell us, "Go to sleep. You are too busy. You are trying so hard to build, to watch, and to labor. Let Me remind you that I love you. You don't need to work so hard. Just go to sleep." Not only does the Lord tell us to go to sleep, but He Himself gives us sleep. He gives us rest. When we are so concerned about our local church, He will say, "Rest." When we are struggling with whether we should serve the Lord full-time, He will say, "rest." If we are full-time and are wondering if we should get a job, He will say "rest." The Lord loves us and gives us sleep. This doesn't mean that we should be lazy. We will see in the next psalm that there is a time to rise up and work. But this psalm firstly tells us not to run around so much and work so hard. Especially when we are young and lacking maturity, we should learn to rest. This follows the realization in the previous psalm that we are good for nothing but death. We have seen our self and want to be delivered, and we have realized that the only way is to be sown as a seed into the ground to die. What is it to die? In this psalm it means to stop working so hard, and rest.

Sleep Results In Transformation

When the Lord loves us, He gives us sleep. We enjoy a sweet restfulness. The more we struggle, the more the Lord says, "It is in vain." All our labor is in vain until we surrender to the Lord and rest in Him. For us to go to sleep can mean one of two things. First, it can mean to stop our working. Second, it can mean to accept the Lord's environmental arrangement for us. We need to learn how to rest in the Lord. This is to pray, "Lord, I will stop myself. I will forget about all my plans and all my striving. I will forget about everything. Lord, I take Your disciplinary hand. I accept Your government and Your authority. I accept what You have arranged for me. I rest in Your hand." When we stop our striving and rest in the

Lord's arrangement we begin to be transformed. It seems that we are asleep, yet we are actually experiencing transformation. Eventually we do not grow so much by our struggling, but by resting in the Lord's hand.

Sleep Issues in Fruitfulness

It is when we allow the Lord to give us sleep that we become fruitful. The next few verses of this psalm are very attractive: "Behold, children are a heritage of Jehovah, the fruit of the womb a reward" (v. 3). When we become restful, then we also become fruitful. When we accept the Lord's arrangement for us, and when we give up trying to do so much for the Lord, then we have children. As we are resting like a seed under the ground, children are being produced. As we rest in the Lord's hand and the Lord's government, we eventually have "the fruit of the womb." This is against our concept. We often think that we need to work hard to be fruitful. We think that we need to equip ourselves, be trained, and do many things, but the Lord says, "No. It is when you sleep that you will have children. When you rest in My hand, you will see fruit." We need to tell the Lord, "Lord, I am willing to bury myself and die. I want to get away from anything of my self, including all my activities. Lord, just give me rest." Then we will be fruitful.

The Process of Transformation Equips Us with Riches to Serve the Lord

The psalm continues, "Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one's youth" (v. 4). This verse is too precious. On one hand, children are "the heritage of Jehovah." Yet on the other hand, they are the "children of one's youth." They are the Lord's children, but they come through us. These children are "like arrows in the hand of a mighty man." They are not merely numbers and statistics, but they are "like arrows." Suppose there is a brother who bears some fruit. That means he becomes "like a mighty man." Formerly he worked so hard, but he labored in vain.

Everything he did to bear fruit was also in vain. But then he went to sleep. He accepted the Lord's arrangement and put himself to death. Not so long afterwards children came out. These children are not numbers, but "arrows," and the brother is "a mighty man."

Why does the Bible use these words? When we trust in the Lord's government, when we learn to have no choice for ourselves but allow Him to put us to sleep, then the Lord causes our "womb" to bear children. In other words, we have an inner growth and transformation which enables us to be fruitful. We produce children as "arrows," which implies something of strength. Not only do we have an outward fruitfulness, but inwardly we are prepared, facilitated, and equipped with riches. We no longer have an immature desire to do many things for the Lord. Instead, we become someone equipped by the Lord with inward strength and riches. That is why our children are likened to arrows. When we are put to sleep we experience growth and transformation. Eventually this process not only enables us to be fruitful, but also makes us strong and mature. We are like a "mighty man" with "arrows." Because we have grown and matured inwardly, we are equipped with the riches to effectively serve the Lord.

Becoming a Vessel unto Honor by Being Transformed and Standing against Our Self

This section of Psalm 127 corresponds to a section of the New Testament. "But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels but also wooden and earthen; and some are unto honor, and some unto dishonor. If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20-21). These verses are a description of the church life. In the Bible, human beings are often described as "vessels." Some vessels are gold and silver; these are vessels of honor. Gold represents God's nature, and silver represents the redemptive work of Christ. People who are constituted with God's divine nature and with Christ's redemptive work are vessels unto honor. There are also vessels unto dishonor, which are

the wooden and earthen vessels. A wooden vessel is a natural person, and an earthen vessel is someone who works with human hands, and not with “divine hands.” We need to ask for the Lord’s mercy that we would never be wooden or earthen vessels. Christianity is filled with these vessels. Many in Christianity are trying to do something to serve the Lord, yet everything they do is with human hands and according to their natural concepts. Many people carry out Christian works in the name of the Lord, yet what they produce has almost nothing to do with Him. These are the vessels unto dishonor.

Paul says, “If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these...” We need to be purified from these things. People prefer being wooden and earthen vessels. To do things as a wooden or earthen vessel can seem simple and effective. But to do something as a gold or silver vessel is not so easy. To be a golden or silver vessel requires a great degree of transformation. That is why we must “cleanse” ourselves and purify ourselves from these things. In other words, we must take a stand against ourselves. We prefer being wooden or earthen, but we must stand against it. Then we will be “a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work.” This corresponds to being a mighty man with arrows in Psalm 127. For us to have arrows means that we are prepared unto every good work. How can we be prepared? Only when we take a stand to purify ourselves. We must purge and deal with what we are by nature. We must refuse to be earthen, common, and low. If we desire to be a vessel unto honor, then that is something high. It requires a great price, with a bold consecration: “Lord, I don’t want to be so natural and common! I stand against myself! I want to be a gold and silver vessel! I want to be a mighty man with arrows! I desire to pay the price to be useful to You! I desire to be prepared unto every good work!”

Second Timothy also tells us another secret of being useful to the Lord: “All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We not only need to take care of life,

we also need to take care of the Word. Enjoying the Word and being constituted with the truth is absolutely necessary for us to be a vessel unto honor. By standing against ourselves, growing in life, and being constituted with the truth, we will be prepared and equipped unto every good work.

**In the Church Life We are Short of
this Fruitful and Equipping Transformation**

We must remember that the only way for us to reach this stage of maturity is to go to sleep. “He gives to His beloved while they sleep.” Brothers and sisters, learn not to struggle. Learn to be restful. Learn to take the Lord’s hand and abide under His governmental dealing. As you are sleeping, “arrows” will come forth. You will become a “mighty man” with children. These children do not come from your work, they come from *you*. They come from your growth and maturity. The process of bearing fruit makes you a fighter, a mighty man. On the one hand you have been resting, yet on the other hand you know how to fight, you know how to struggle, you know how to deal with the enemy, and you know how to gain the victory. You are a mighty man with arrows. These arrows didn’t come by doing things outwardly. They came by an inner work of transformation. Because you were so much before the Lord, you allowed the Lord to transform you and make you fruitful. As you were asleep, and in your submission to the Lord, transformation came. Out of transformation you became a mighty man with arrows.

In the church life we are not short of desire or consecration towards the Lord. We are short of what this psalm describes as transformation. We are short of “arrows.” How many of us can say, “I am a mighty man with arrows”? How many of us can genuinely say, “I know how to preach the gospel. I know how to share with people in a way that conveys the riches of Christ. I know how to pray effectively. I know how to minister the word. I know how to help people into their spirit. I know how to operate for the building of the church!” All of these items are like arrows. So many of

us are filled with desire, but we build, we watch, and we labor all in vain. Therefore we need to learn to be transformed. We need to submit ourselves to the Lord's governmental hand and let the Lord transform us. This transformation will cause arrows to be brought forth. We will become a mighty man who is equipped and prepared. Then we will know how to effectively serve the Lord.

Today in the church life we are so short of mighty men! We all love the Lord, we have all given ourselves to the Lord, but how many of us have truly gone to sleep? How many of us have really learned the lesson, "Lord, I rest in You. I trust you to transform me and make me fruitful. As I am buried, as I learn to put myself aside, may there be children from the fruit of my womb. Build up something in me that can make me useful to You." Only then can we know how to confront and deal with so many situations. Only then are we equipped with arrows to fight the enemy. After going through such a process we will be useful to the Lord.

Our Transformation is for the Church Life

This experience of transformation can only take place in the church life, because this is the place where we experience the Lord's governmental hand. Furthermore, it can only be retained in the church life. That is why this psalm concludes, "Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them. He will not be put to shame when he speaks with enemies in the gate" (v. 5). The psalm began with so many things done in vain, but it concludes with, "Blessed is the man." The word "blessed" in the Bible can also be translated "happy." At this point in the psalm, we are happy. We are joyful, because our quiver is full of arrows. What is the "quiver" here? The quiver is the church life. When there is no quiver, then there is no place for all the arrows. We may have so many arrows, but without the church life they will all disappear. We must be in the church life for all of our experiences of the Lord to be retained. No matter how useful, capable, or well-equipped we are, we must have the church life to uphold us. All our transformation, all our equipping, and all our fruitfulness is for the church life. When we have a

quiver full of arrows, then we are truly blessed with the rich enjoyment of our transformation.

**PSALM 128: THE ENJOYMENT OF A MATURE
AND LIFE-GIVING LABOR**

**After Experiencing Transformation,
We Can Enjoy the Fruit of Our Labor**

Psalm 128 begins, “Blessed is everyone that fears Jehovah, who walks in His ways. You will indeed eat the labor of your hands; you will be blessed, and it will go well with you” (v. 1-2). At the beginning of Psalm 127 we labored in vain. Now in Psalm 128 we eat the labor of our hands. Because we have slept, and because we have been equipped and prepared unto every good work, we can rise up and serve the Lord effectively. Then we can enjoy the fruit of our labor.

The psalm continues, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house. Your children will be like olive shoots round about your table” (v. 3). This verse is not meant to be taken only literally. Instead, we should apply it to ourselves. After we have experienced what has been described in the previous psalms, we are like a “house.” Furthermore, within our house there is a table. A house is for resting, while a table is for standing. This means that we are able to give others rest, and we are able to help others to stand.

In our house there is a “fruitful vine.” Not only do we have wine, we produce wine. Furthermore, we also have olive plants. We produce wine, and we also produce oil. This is marvelous. When the good Samaritan took care of the wounded man, he ministered oil and wine (Luke 10:34). Oil and wine represent the life supply from the Lord for anointing and for enjoyment. The Lord as the good Samaritan healed the wounded one with these two items.

After we learn how to sleep, and after we become like a mighty man with arrows, then we are able to labor. Within ourselves we produce oil and wine for others to enjoy. We become like a vine

tree and an olive tree. Wherever we go, oil and wine go with us. We are just as the Lord was in His ministry. As we labor, wounds can be healed, and people can be restored. We can bring people to joy. We should all desire to be such a person in the church life. We don't just enjoy wine for ourselves, we produce it for others to enjoy. We don't just have oil for ourselves, we produce oil to anoint others' wounds. We are like a house and a table that can bring people to rest and cause them to stand. As we labor and serve in such a way, we minister Christ to people in full. Then we ourselves have the rich enjoyment of our labor. We eat the labor of our hands.

Our Life-giving Labor Makes Us a Blessing for Many Generations

The psalm continues, "Thus will the man be blessed who fears Jehovah. Jehovah bless you from Zion; and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life" (v. 4-5). Now we are blessed, and we become a blessing. When we live such a life, we become a profit to the Lord's testimony. The next verse says, "May you also see the children of your children" (v. 6a). Our being a blessing to the churches is no longer limited. The blessing here is for generations to come. When a true servant of the Lord departs there is still a blessing for many generations. For example, Watchman Nee is gone, but we are his "children's children." We still love him and enjoy him. He was just like a vine tree and an olive tree. Brother Lee is the same. These two brothers are examples of men who became a real life supply, because they learned how to "sleep." They learned how to fall into the ground and rest in the Lord's hand. They became ones who could impart the oil and the wine. That is why they have been such a blessing. Their blessing will continue from generation to generation.

The psalmist concludes, "Peace be upon Israel." When there are brothers in the church life who are as a wine tree and an olive tree, then there is peace. We should pray, "Lord, I desire to grow and be transformed in such a healthy way. I want to know how to rest in You. I want to learn how to submit to Your arrangement for

me. I pray eventually that there would be oil and wine within me. I pray that I could labor with blessing to the church.” May the Lord have mercy on us that we would all become such a blessing.

CHAPTER FOUR

PSALMS 129-131—THE STAGE OF ENLARGEMENT

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We have seen that the third stage of the Psalms of Ascent, the stage of enjoyment, begins with two different “turns” from captivity. In Psalm 126 we are freed from the world and from Christianity to be brought into the church life. After enjoying the church life we are eventually released from the captivity of our self-life by falling into the ground to die. This leads to the experience of transformation as seen in Psalm 127. In the process of being transformed we become a “mighty man with arrows.” As we go through the process of bearing fruit in the church life we became equipped with riches to serve the Lord. This issues in the mature and healthy serving life as described in Psalm 128. We become like an “olive tree” and a “fruitful vine,” which means we become a supply of “oil” for the church to grow and a supply of “wine” for the church to be joyful. We no longer labor in vain but are able to produce and minister life to meet the needs of those around us.

Once we come to this point in the Psalms of Ascent we may feel, “It is sufficient. There is no need for anything more. This is as high as it can go.” However, we still need another “turn” in our experience. We have had two “turns” already, in Psalm 126 – a turn to come into the church life and a deeper turn to be freed from

our self-life. Now we need an even greater turn, which we call “the stage of enlargement.” The Lord must enlarge us so that we no longer consider ourselves to be special individuals. No matter how mature or spiritual we are, we can only satisfy the Lord by taking care of His testimony. The Lord must work on us and enlarge us so that our desire is not for ourselves, but for the whole church life to be healthy.

The Lord enlarges us through three different experiences. Firstly, He arranges difficulties and afflictions in our environment so that we would grow properly (Psalm 129). Secondly, He exposes our sinful condition as we spend time in His presence (Psalm 130). Thirdly, He brings us to a state of lowliness and submission (Psalm 131). By these healthy experiences we are enlarged to properly care for His testimony.

**PSALM 129: BEING ENLARGED THROUGH
THE LORD’S ENVIRONMENTAL DEALINGS**

**We Experience Affliction for
the Sake of the Lord’s Testimony**

Psalm 129 begins, “Many times have they afflicted me since my youth, Oh, let Israel say” (v. 1). The writer of this psalm has had many years of experiencing suffering and affliction. However, he realizes that it was all for “Israel,” the Lord’s testimony. This verse indicates that the psalmist is no longer afraid of hard times, nor is he trying to escape difficult situations. He realizes that trials and afflictions have been with him since his youth, yet they were not for himself but for the sake of the Lord’s testimony. That is why he says, “Oh, let *Israel* say.” Then he repeats, “many times have they afflicted me since my youth,” but adds, “yet they did not prevail against me” (v. 2). In other words the psalmist is saying, “After experiencing so many years of hardship and trials, I can testify that the Lord has always had His way. Outwardly it seemed that I failed and was beaten; but in reality I gained the victory. Outwardly I had no way to overcome all the afflictions. I was often

oppressed, defeated, and even tempted to run away. However, after many years of being in all these kinds of situations, now I can testify, they did not prevail against me! I am still here! I am still fighting for the Lord's testimony!" These two verses are very sweet. The writer has been dealt with his entire life since his youth, yet he realizes that the dealings and afflictions always came to him from the Lord with His testimony in view.

Those who have been following the Lord for many years can testify of this. It is not a proud or improper boasting but the declaring of a marvelous fact: "I am still here! Praise the Lord, I am part of Israel! I am part of the Lord's testimony! Many times have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me!" Sometimes the young people in the church look at the older ones and think, "You are too old. You are not in 'the flow.' You are not 'up-to-date' with the Lord's present burden. That is why *we* are the generation that the Lord needs to bring Him back!" But the older saints used to be younger, and they once thought the same thing: "*We* are the generation that will bring the Lord back." Now the older generation can only say, "Many times have they afflicted me since my youth." Then instead of, "Oh, let Israel say," they would declare, "Oh, let my local church say!" In their local church over the years they have experienced many trials and hard times. They have shed many tears. They have gone through situations that were beyond their understanding or endurance. Yet they can say, "Praise the Lord, we are still here! They did not prevail against me!" Younger saints, don't despise the older ones. They have acquired many riches. They have gained something precious from the Lord for the sake of His testimony. This is proven just by the fact that they are still here.

The younger ones among us should ask themselves, "Will I still be here in ten years?" This is not a light matter. Young brothers and sisters, there is no guarantee that in a few years all of you will still be here. That is why it is so improper for you to look at the older saints and think, "You are out of date." Without the older ones you wouldn't even be here. You need to learn to appreciate them and be thankful for them. They have paid a tremendous price to remain

in the church life. The older ones can testify of much affliction from their youth. Ever since they first began to follow the Lord in the church life, He has measured to them all kinds of difficult environments. Yet the older ones can boldly testify, “They have not prevailed against me!”

All of the saints who have been in the church life for many years may not feel prevailing or useful, but the fact is that they are still here. It is not a small thing that they have remained after going through so many difficulties and trials. Praise the Lord, they are still here! They are a blessing to the church! Once they were only spiritual by themselves, but now they have progressed to having a maturity for the entire Body of Christ. For the Lord to gain His testimony there is the need for us to be enlarged. The first and best instrument the Lord uses to enlarge us is affliction. We have to be thankful to the Lord. He allows us to experience trials and afflictions so that we would mature into a blessing to the Body.

The Lord’s “Plowing” Work Brings Us Low and Cuts Us Deeply

The third verse of this psalm is one of the most precious verses in the Bible. It is so profound that it is difficult to appreciate: “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long” (v. 3). This is a poetic description of environmental dealings and affliction. Affliction causes us to be made very low, because we are constantly under something we can’t handle. We usually think that our usefulness comes from our being made high and victorious. But from the Lord’s point of view, our usefulness comes from being brought low. For example, we often like to be involved in spiritual activities because they make us feel we are important. We are in the front. But when the Lord puts His hand upon us, He often pushes us to the back. He doesn’t allow us to be so high. This is an example of what it means for the “plowers” to “plow on our back.”

Whenever you are involved in spiritual activities, you feel that you are a high person. You may even feel that you are on the

“cutting edge” of the church life. When I was a young brother I hated to miss any spiritual activity. I always liked to be in the front, but the Lord always pushed me to the back. There was a period of time when I would come to the meeting hall after school every day. There I would meet with some other seeking brothers to study the Word and to pray. Then one day all of a sudden they weren’t there when I showed up. For several days when I went, they wouldn’t be there. Finally I saw one of them. I was happy to see him and asked him where all the brothers had been. He replied that the elders had selected some brothers who were “hopeful” and had taken them someplace to have a special training. My thought was, “Oh Lord, I gave my life to You, and I’m not even hopeful! All the hopeful ones went, and I’m not even selected!” But this was from the Lord. The Lord desires to make us low, but we desire to be high. We like to rise up, but the Lord tells us to come down. The Lord will arrange everything in our environment for us to be made low.

It is for this reason that the psalmist says, “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.” This portrays a deep experience in life. The Lord will cause a plow to bring us low. The Lord not only makes us low, He also cuts us deeply. When we are plowed and brought low, it is to the degree that no one sees us. We are no longer up front, and we are no longer so high. We are as low as a furrow in the ground. We are in a situation where no one even sees our face. Although we have given ourselves to the Lord and His purpose, for some reason the elders don’t even notice us. We have been so desperate to consecrate ourselves to Christ, yet no one finds that out. This means that we are brought low. We are even “cut” in our experience. We are like the earth, being plowed upon our back.

The Lord Plows “Furrows” in Our Person for Life to Grow

Everyone who loves the Lord will experience affliction. The psalmist vividly describes his affliction after many years of experience: “I was made so low. I was put in a place of abasement. I was

put in a place where no one respected me, no one appreciated me, and no one realized my desire or consecration. I was so low, like the ground. And while I was so low, a plow came to cut me. My back was plowed, and it cut me so deeply. Not only was I oppressed in a low place, but my very person was cut and wounded.” The discipline of the Lord always comes at exactly the right place and at the right time. He plows “on our back.” Often we would complain, “Lord, why me?” Especially when we are young, we have a lot of self-pity. But after many years of being plowed by the Lord governmental hand, we come to realize that every instance of plowing was at the right time and in the right place. As we go through it, it seems that the Lord is unreasonable, even irrational. But when it is finished we recognize that it was exactly what we needed to grow.

When the “plow” comes in our experience, it is not pleasant. It makes us as low as the ground. We feel that we are abased. We are overwhelmed with difficulties. At the same time, we feel that the cutting of the plow is too painful. The suffering seems so unnecessary. But again, after it is over we eventually realize that it was all at the right time and in the right place. The Lord knows exactly what He is doing. His intention is that the plow would make long furrows in our back. A furrow is a narrow ditch plowed into the ground for growing crops. At a farm we can often see one furrow after another dug into the soil so that many different crops can grow. Spiritually speaking, when we are cut deeply by the Lord it is for us to grow in life and bear abundant fruit. If we desire to have a rich and bountiful growth in life so that the Lord can use us as a blessing to the church, we must be willing for the Lord to cut deeply into our person. He will plow over our back until there are long furrows for growth.

Today there are many young people among us who love the Lord. Young people are often so “complete.” This means that they do not have many furrows. They do not have the mark of the Lord’s workmanship, or a sign of the Lord’s dealing with them. They have an objective Christ but not enough of a subjective Christ. When such young ones bring in a blessing it is out of their ability, not out of

their person. Some people are so capable that it seems they don't need to be broken. There are many Christian workers on television. How many of them have furrows? They may be very effective, and they can get thousands of people saved, but they can never build up the church. They serve the Lord according to their ability and their talent, but not according to their person. Their person is untouched and unbroken.

When we serve the Lord, it is good if people can look at us and see furrows. This means that we don't impress people with our talent or ability. Instead people say, "There is something different about this person. He has the mark of the Lord's workmanship. He is a man of God." It is the plowing and cutting of deep and long furrows that give us the healthy growth in life. We all should be those who are thoroughly marked with the Lord's disciplinary workmanship. Then people will not get the impression that we are talented. Instead they will recognize something of life. They will recognize that we are people of God, because the Lord has plowed us time and time again for life to grow.

We Should Not Try to Escape the Lord's Plowing in Our Environment

For us to serve the Lord we must be enlarged. This means that we must prepare ourselves to be plowed. Plowing begins in our "youth." Once we begin to love the Lord His hand is already upon us in our environment. The most important thing to remember as we experience the Lord's plowing is not to escape. We must always remind ourselves, "This is exactly where the Lord wants me." We should not run away from where the Lord has put us. When we are faithful to stay in the environment that He has arranged, there will be furrows in our experience. Then when people see us they will sense something of life. They won't sense our talent or ability, even if it is there. Many young people are talented and hopeful, but they never fulfill their potential because they refuse to be plowed. If we receive the Lord's environmental arrangement and refuse to escape from His dealing, then the Lord will plow

furrows in our back. This will enlarge us so that we can become a blessing to the church.

To follow the Lord is not cheap by any means. There is no shortcut. We should never think, "The Lord is moving so fast! Now I can grow so quickly!" Biblically it has never been so. We cannot circumvent the normal and healthy process of true Christian growth. If we desire to grow in life, and if we desire to serve the Lord effectively, then we must pass through this process. We must ask ourselves if we are willing, or would we prefer to hide from the Lord's plowing work? When the Lord plows long furrows in our back we may feel extremely low and in a situation of abasement. We may think it is too painful to endure. But we also must remember, as we saw in Psalm 123, that the Lord's hand of discipline is a hand of supply, support, leading, and comfort. The Lord will be with us as we go through His environmental dealings. Our experience of the Lord's plowing work may be difficult and sometimes almost unbearable. However, it affords us a deep, sweet and romantic enjoyment of Him. He will supply us and make Himself known to us. Eventually we will look back and say, "Thank You, Lord. That was precious. It was exactly what I needed to grow."

The best way for us to handle a difficult environment is to tell the Lord, "Lord, this is what I need. This is exactly right. I agree with what You have arranged for me." This is not always easy. Perhaps we are being unfairly criticized or condemned by someone. Our attitude should still be, "Yes, Lord. I need this. I agree with Your plowing work." We should prepare ourselves. If we truly want to be enlarged then we must tell the Lord, "Lord, I am ready. Put Your hand on me. Plow over my back. I know that when You plow, furrows will be cut. Then Your life can grow." If we are so "perfect," so complete and so preserved, if we are still so much in ourselves, then how can the Lord grow in us? We must allow the Lord to deal with our person through the environment He has arranged for us. The Lord will plow over our back at the right time and in the right place so that furrows will be produced and abundant life can come forth. This is what we need for our enlargement.

**If We Do Not Cooperate With The Lord’s Plowing
We Cannot Be a Blessing to the Church**

The rest of Psalm 129 is related to the plowing and the producing of furrows for growth. The psalmist writes, “Jehovah is righteous; He has cut the cords of the wicked. May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. May they be like grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper does not fill his hand, or he who binds sheaves, his bosom. Nor may those who pass by say, The blessing of Jehovah be upon you! We bless you in the name of Jehovah” (v. 4-8). This is a description of those who do not cooperate with the Lord’s hand. Unless we allow the Lord to plow us, eventually we will wither without any growth. We will be fruitless in our experience. If we do not learn to receive the Lord’s plowing work, then nothing of life can come out of us. Regardless of our talent, capability, or potential, we will be unable to render blessing to the church. May we all learn this lesson, especially those of us who are young. May we allow the Lord to plow us so that we can become a blessing to the church.

**PSALM 130: BEING ENLARGED THROUGH
THE KNOWLEDGE OF OURSELVES**

Affliction in Our Environment Drives Us to Pray

Psalm 130 begins, “Out of the depths I have called upon You, O Jehovah. O Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” (v. 1-2). This verse follows from the previous psalm. Whenever we experience the Lord’s plowing work through our environment, we become a person of prayer. We are not this way by nature. We prefer to be wild and unrestricted and usually don’t feel the need to pray. But when we go through a trial, or when something drastic happens, then we become a prayerful person. We are driven to the Lord. We call on the Lord “out of the depths.” Because of our affliction we pray, “O Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”

**Spending Time in the Lord's Presence
Exposes Our Sinful Condition**

The next verse is extremely precious: "If You, O Jehovah, marked iniquities, who, O Lord, would stand?" (v. 3). The psalmist now has a realization of who he is. After experiencing the Lord's plowing, and after touching the Lord in prayer, the psalmist knows himself. He realizes that he is filled with iniquity. Previously he was so buoyant and strong. In the stage of enjoyment he became a "mighty man with arrows." He was like a fruitful vine and an olive tree, effectively serving the Lord and the saints. Yet now he has passed through a deeper process. He went through some plowing from the Lord, and deep furrows were cut in his back for him to grow in life. In the midst of this he cried out to the Lord and made supplications. This brought him to the proper realization of himself. Because of the Lord's cultivation, the psalmist can say, "Lord, I am in Your hand. I see now who I really am. I know what kind of person I am. If you marked iniquities, who would stand?"

When we experience the Lord's plowing work, and as we become more prayerful in His presence, we have a much greater realization of who we really are. This can only come from the Lord's cultivating work. As spend time in the Lord's presence we are exposed. Even though the Lord previously brought us to a certain maturity in life, now we see that we are filled with iniquity. Then we can pray, "Lord, when I was young, I didn't realize I was *that* sinful. I didn't realize I was *that* evil. When I was young I was still very bold to do things for You. But now, Lord, I have grown. You have arranged many environments to cut me and deal with me. You have caused me to spend so much more time with You in prayer. Lord, now I have begun to see who I am. How can I come to You? How can I even stand in Your presence? How can I possibly satisfy You? Lord, I am just a sinner, even the chief sinner. I am filled with iniquity. I am a wicked and defeated person. How could You have chosen a person like me? If You marked iniquities, O Lord, who would stand?"

Seeing Ourselves in the Lord's Presence Makes Us Dependent on His Mercy

Before we love the Lord we may not think we are so evil. We may even feel quite good about ourselves. But after we love the Lord for many years, we realize that were it not for the Lord's mercy we would be capable of any sin. There is not even one sin that we are not capable of committing. Were it not for the Lord's saving hand we would be vulnerable to any temptation. The Lord is the one preserving us, upholding us, strengthening us, and forbidding us to fall. As for ourselves, we are hopelessly sinful and capable of any evil. After we have such a realization about ourselves, we are enlarged. We no longer have the attitude, "I have grown in life. I have attained something. Now I am able to help the church." Instead we realize, "Lord, I have nothing. I'm just a sinner. If You were to mark all my iniquities, I couldn't possibly stand in Your presence. I am utterly dependent on Your mercy."

If the Lord were to write down a list of our sins, how long would it be? It would fill up volumes. If we were to read even one page, we couldn't handle it. We would say, "I am so evil! I am so sinful! I am so far from the Lord! I am so rebellious, and so unwilling to submit! Oh Lord, this is who I am!" For this reason we no longer have any trust in ourselves. We realize that we are utterly dependent on the Lord's mercy. It is when we are under the Lord's shining to this degree that we become qualified to build the church.

The Knowledge of Ourselves Makes Us the Proper Person for the Building Up of the Church

How can we be built up with others in the church life? First we have to go through affliction from the Lord's governmental hand. As He plows over our person we need to spend much time with Him in prayer. It is in prayer, in the Lord's light, that we are brought to realize who we are. Then we will cry out, "Lord, if You would mark iniquities, who would stand? I'm only here by Your mercy!" This makes us the proper person for the building up of the church.

The more we think that we are “right” the more the Lord will bring us to Psalm 130. To say “I am right!” is to be wrong to the uttermost. It means we are completely the wrong person for the building of the church. For example, suppose a leading brother harshly rebukes us. When we see who we really are, we will not defend ourselves because we know there is nothing to defend. Our realization will be, “I am worse than you say.” This is the secret for building the church. We must be brought to this realization: “I was conceived in sin. I grew up in my self-life. In all these years I have been in rebellion against the Lord.” Then at the same time we should pray, “Yet, Lord, I am still able to love You. I am still able to love Your church. Thank You, Lord. This is all by Your mercy.” Then we are the proper person for the building up of the church.

For the church to be built up, we don’t need to be so “right.” Instead, we need to be more “wrong.” Whenever we think that we are right, we are filled with opinions and self-justification. For us to be built together in the church, and for us to participate in the Lord’s building work, we must realize, “I am terrible. I am so far away from God. I am so sinful, so evil, so short, so weak, and so defeated. I am so rebellious, even against the Lord Himself. I am just a terrible person.” Then we will not dare to voice so many opinions. At the same time we will be very open to the other saints. Once we see light on ourselves, then building becomes easy. If all of us realize “I am the wrong person” when we are together with other saints, would there be any arguments? Would there be any strife? Would there be any opinions? If some leading brothers are together and have the Lord’s light on themselves, would there be any competition or struggling between them? They would say, “We are nothing. We are only here by the Lord’s mercy.” Isn’t this precious? When we see who we are, it is easy for the church to be built up.

**The More the Lord Forgives Us,
The More We Will Fear Him**

The realization of who we are should not bring us under condemnation. For this the reason the psalmist continues, “But with

You there is forgiveness, that You would be feared” (v. 4). The Lord’s light should cause us to trust in the Lord’s forgiveness. We should not overly dwell on our sinfulness, but on the Lord’s salvation. This verse contains the interesting fact that the more the Lord forgives us, the more we fear Him. We should not think that enjoying the Lord’s forgiveness will lead us to be loose and careless in our behavior. Actually, the more the Lord forgives us the more we are afraid to sin again. Our experience of forgiveness makes us very sensitive to the Lord. We develop a godly fear, because we do not want to offend Him.

We Must Wait on the Lord and Hope in His Word

Furthermore, because we see who we are we learn to wait on the Lord. “I wait for Jehovah; my soul waits, and in His word I hope” (v. 5). We used to be so confident in our ability to serve the Lord. Now we realize, “I am a hopeless, useless person. There is no way for me to build up the church, to help the saints, or to please the Lord. All I can do is wait for His mercy.” Even though we know we are so terrible, we cannot go back to the world or try to escape the church life. All we can do is wait on the Lord. Not only do we wait, but we hope in the Lord’s word. We realize that His word can nourish us, sustain us and lead us. When we are so aware of our poor condition because of the Lord’s shining, we should hope in His word. The Lord’s word can re-establish us in life.

We Must Give Ourselves To the Lord’s Testimony and Trust in His Redemption

The psalm continues, “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, yes watchmen for the morning” (v. 6). While we wait on the Lord, we are also watching. “Hope in Jehovah, O Israel” (v. 7a). We have seen that Israel represents the Lord’s testimony. Not only should we wait, hope, and watch, but we must give ourselves to the Lord’s testimony. Before we experi-

enced the Lord's dealing and shining, we felt that we were honoring the Lord when we gave ourselves to Him. Now our feeling is very different. As we give ourselves to the Lord, we consider it a mercy and a privilege. We realize, "It is an honor that the Lord will even accept my service. It is the Lord's mercy that I am allowed to remain with all of these dear saints. Everyone else is so marvelous, but I am so poor. Thank You, Lord, that I can give myself to You for Your testimony." We no longer think that it is an honor to the Lord that we serve Him; instead, we are honored by the fact that He accepts our service.

"For with Jehovah there is lovingkindness, and with Him abundantly there is redemption" (v. 7). Praise the Lord for His redemption! The Lord is the one who redeems us from all our corruption and iniquity. "And it is He who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities" (v. 8). Individually and corporately, the Lord redeems us from everything that is not of Himself. The church will be free from all its iniquity because the Lord is the church's Redeemer. Psalm 130 is a wonderful psalm. After experiencing what is described in this psalm we truly become enlarged. By our knowledge of ourselves and our trust in the Lord's redemption we become enlarged for the sake of His testimony.

**PSALM 131: BEING ENLARGED THROUGH
LOWLINESS AND SUBMISSION**

**By Knowing Ourselves, We Are
Humbled and Brought Low**

Psalm 131 begins, "O Jehovah, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; nor do I go about in things too great or too wondrous for me" (v. 1). When we come to this experience we have gained some maturity. In Psalm 128, the last psalm from the stage of enjoyment, we were likened to a vine tree and an olive tree. This means that our growth in life had a certain manifestation. Our labor was fruitful and productive. Wherever we went, people received help. People appreciated us, and may even have followed us. This

seems quite glorious. However, when we are like this, there is the danger that we will think we are “somebody.”

But then, in Psalm 129, we went through some plowing. We experienced affliction in our environment. The Lord cut us deeply so that life could grow even more. Soon afterward, in Psalm 130, we received light on our condition and saw who we really were. We realized that we were not so great or so wonderful. Instead we were filled with iniquity. After receiving the plowing from the Lord’s hand and the shining of the Lord’s light, we can give the testimony here in Psalm 131: “O Jehovah, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty.” In other words, we no longer think highly of ourselves.

When saints are young in the church life they often think that they are important. Because they are so zealous to give themselves to the Lord, they feel that they are the hope for the church’s future. Eventually they have opinions about the elders and the older saints. They even become disdainful. They may think, “Who are these elders? They are all so ‘out-of-date.’ We are the hope for the Lord’s recovery!” This means that their eyes have become “haughty.” They consider themselves to be higher than the other saints. But when the Lord comes to work on us and shines His light upon us, then our eyes look down. We no longer think that we are so important. We no longer think of ourselves as a vine tree, or as a mighty man with arrows, or as a great servant of the Lord. Instead, we walk with lowliness and humility. We realize that we are on the same level as all the other dear saints. We no longer measure ourselves against them because we are the same as they are. Then we can testify to the Lord, “I have nothing to be proud of. I am not higher than anyone. I am just one of the brothers. My heart is not proud, and my eyes are not haughty. Lord, I am here by Your mercy.”

We No Longer Desire to be Exercised in Great Matters

Furthermore, we can also testify, “Nor do I go about in things too great or too wondrous for me” (v. 1b). Not only do we no

longer consider ourselves so high, but we no longer look for great things in which to participate. Suppose the Lord is moving dramatically in another country. This is a great matter, much greater than our local situation. If we are young in the Lord then once we hear about it we will immediately respond, "I am ready to go!" But after we see who we are in the Lord's light, then we are not so quick to respond. Instead we will pray and be restful. We can trust that the Lord will make it known to us if He wants us to go. When we receive the Lord's shining we become very careful. Because we see who we are, we do not trust ourselves. We learn not to "go about in things too great or too wondrous." We allow the Lord to lead us if we should be involved in something great that He is doing.

There is a song (Chinese Hymn 305) written by a Quaker sister named Anna Laetitia Waring. One verse in particular fully corresponds to Psalm 131. It says, "I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro, seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know; I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go." We often have a "restless will that hurries to and fro." In other words, our natural tendency is to go wherever the "action" is. If the place of action changes then we rush off in that direction. Furthermore, we are often "seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know." All of us would like to accomplish at least a few great things for the Lord. We all wish that we could go out on the street and preach the gospel and have hundreds of people get saved and baptized. We seek after "great things." So the writer of this hymn says, "I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro, seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know." She does not want an unrestful will, rushing to and fro, from one activity to another. She does not desire to do great things, like holding big conferences and getting so many people saved. Furthermore, she doesn't even seek for some "secret thing to know." She is not after "secret" knowledge in which she can boast. Her motive towards the Lord is simple and pure.

Then she says, "I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go." In other words, "Lord, I want to be so one with You. I want

to be like a little child. Then I will know how to respond to Your move. I will know what it is You want from me. Lord, I am just here to be guided by You.” This hymn matches the feeling of Psalm 131. As we have said, Psalm 131 is very different from the previous Psalms of Ascent. Not long ago we were like a “mighty man with arrows.” We were like a fruitful vine and an olive tree. But now we are different. Because of the Lord’s environmental arrangement and the shining of His light, we can say, “Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; nor do I go about in things too great or too wondrous for me.” We have reached a level of maturity. Both this psalm and this hymn have a sweet fragrance. When we have entered into this experience we may not do so much or be so active, yet our very person becomes a great blessing to the Lord’s testimony.

We Become As A Weaned Child, Submissive to the Lord

Psalm 131 continues, “Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (v. 2). Before a child is weaned, he is very demanding. He will cry for milk at any time. Once he is weaned, he becomes very restful. He knows that the milk will come, so he is quiet. For the psalmist to become like a weaned child means that he is now a quiet, restful person. He knows how to behave properly. He has calmed and quieted his soul.

When we are like very young children, spiritually speaking, the Lord constantly gives us “milk” whenever we ask for it. We can demand things from the Lord and He still tolerates us. The Lord even answers foolish prayers, because He knows that we are young. But sooner or later, after we grow, the Lord will not answer us in the same way. When we demand something from the Lord, He may say, “You are like a child crying at midnight. I will feed you according to My schedule. Now is not the time, so you will just have to wait.” This does not mean that the Lord no longer meets our needs. It means that He is the one in charge, not us. We are

like a weaned child, so we can no longer force Him to give in to us. The writer of this psalm has become such a person. He is not doing so many things to get the Lord's attention. He has become like a weaned child who has calmed and quieted his soul. He is no longer so demanding, but submissive to the Lord.

Psalm 131 ends, "Hope in Jehovah, O Israel, from now and to eternity" (v. 3). When we read this verse we should have an abiding sense of worship. Now we are people with maturity. Our soul is like a weaned child, so that we are quiet and restful. We may not be so active, but we have a pure and simple desire to be one with the Lord. We enjoy submitting to Him. We are calm and restful in His presence and are available for His needs. Now we are able to properly care for the Lord's testimony. This concludes the stage of enlargement from the Psalms of Ascent. In the next and final stage we will see the full display of maturity.

CHAPTER FIVE

PSALMS 132-134—THE STAGE OF MATURITY

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

As we come to the last stage of the Psalms of Ascent we should remember that these psalms contain very few teachings and doctrines. However, they are rich in experience. For this reason what we have been sharing should not be taken as a doctrinal expounding of the Bible. Other writers and expositors have interpreted these psalms differently, but our desire is to share these psalms according to spiritual experience. In our Christian life we are ascending from one stage of experience to another. We have already covered the stages of vision, consecration, enjoyment, and enlargement. Now we come to the fifth stage, the stage of maturity.

The maturity that is described in the last stage of the Psalms of Ascent is different from the maturity we have seen in the previous stages. For example, the third stage, the stage of enjoyment, issued in a certain kind of maturity. However, that maturity was very individualistic. In the stage of enjoyment we became a blessing to the Body, and we were even appreciated by the other saints, but we may not have actually *seen* the Body. Instead, we felt that we ourselves were quite high and important. This is why we needed to go through the fourth stage, the stage of enlargement. In order for us to be enlarged the Lord caused us to be brought low. We experienced difficulties and afflictions in our environment which forced

us to spend more time in the Lord's presence. In the light of His presence we saw who we really were. We could no longer think of ourselves so highly. We realized that without the Lord's mercy we were capable of committing any sin. We could no longer be so proud or so haughty, and we no longer desired to do great things. Instead, we became as a "weaned child," humble and submissive to the Lord and with a proper attitude towards the church life. This means that we entered into a healthy and greater maturity.

By the time we reach the fifth stage of the Psalms of Ascent we have learned to tell the Lord, "I dare not do anything, nor can I do anything. Lord, all of my past spiritual ambitions, and all of my desires to be used by You in a great way, are gone now. I realize that I am nothing. I just want to be a child in Your presence." This is the result of our healthy growth in life. In the past we were once filled with "arrows," and thus able to deal with all kinds of situations. We became a supply of life and joy to the church life. But then the Lord came in to bring us down. The Lord plowed on our back and produced furrows for more life to grow. By our growth in life we were enlightened about our real condition before the Lord. We saw that we were only a sinner, even the chief sinner, and that we were utterly dependent on the Lord's mercy. This caused us to be enlarged and brought us into a quiet restfulness concerning the Lord's testimony. It is in this restfulness, after being enlarged, that we are able to exercise according to our maturity.

Now we come to the final stage of our growth in life as portrayed in the Psalms of Ascent. Psalm 132 portrays our exercise in maturity for the sake of the Lord's testimony. Psalms 133 and 134 are the manifestation and display of the church life in maturity. We will see that eventually our maturity is no longer an individual experience, but a corporate one.

PSALM 132: THE EXERCISE OF MATURITY

**The Mature One is Desperate for
the Substance of the Lord's Testimony**

Psalm 132 shows us a mature saint who knows how to rest, how to be in submission, and how to wait on the Lord. Yet in this situation of restfulness the writer still has a desperation. This may seem like a contradiction, but it is accurate according to our experience. The times when we are most anxious are often the times that we are most restful, and the times when we are most restful are often the times that we are most desperate. What is it that we are desperate for? We are desperate for the substance of the Lord's testimony to be produced. When we have grown to this stage of maturity we have a burning desperation. We cry out from within ourselves, "Yes, I see the Lord's testimony. I see the local churches. But where is the substance of all the things I see? Where is the substance of all the things we talk about? We have heard so much, we know so much, we understand so much, but we are so short of the substance of the Lord's testimony!"

This is why Psalm 132 is so crucial in our experience. It shows us a mature saint who has grown by the Lord's transforming hand. He has become one with the Lord. He no longer thinks, "How can I bless other saints? How can I be used by the Lord? How can I be a blessing to the church?" Now he is in a different realm. He can tell the Lord, "I don't whether I'm a blessing or not. I don't care whether I'm used by You or not. These things no longer matter to me. But Lord, I am still so desperate! I ask You, where is the reality? Where is the substance of all the things we have talked about?"

Some of us have been in the church life for a long period of time. After being in the church life for many years it is easy for us to develop an attitude of indifference. We begin to say to ourselves, "What's the point? Nothing works. All of the conferences and trainings are good, but afterwards we are always the same. We have heard about so many high things, but in practice they all seem

ineffective. There is no impact. It just doesn't matter." This only shows that we need to grow unto maturity. We need to exercise according to what is described in Psalm 132. This psalm shows us a person who realizes something of the Lord's testimony. He knows that God has a habitation among His people. However, the psalmist also realizes, "We are short of reality. We are short of substance." Instead of feeling discouraged or becoming indifferent, he rises up and begins to fight. He fights for the reality of what he has seen.

We also should have such a fight. We should struggle for the reality and the substance of the Lord's testimony. We all realize that the Lord's testimony and His habitation are here with us, but we also know there is something lacking. We know that we are far short of the substance of what we have seen. Instead of becoming defeated or discouraged we must rise up to fight. Instead of being indifferent we must begin to struggle to bring in the very substance which establishes the reality of the Lord's testimony among us. This is a marvelous and glorious struggle.

The Mature One Vows to "the Mighty One of Jacob"

The psalmist begins, "Remember, O Jehovah, for David's sake all his afflictions; how he swore to Jehovah and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 1-2). Why does the psalmist tell the Lord to remember David? David was a man after God's own heart. Despite of all his iniquities and shortcomings David satisfied God's desire. The psalmist reminds Jehovah that David vowed to "the Mighty One of Jacob." In the Bible, Jacob represents someone who experiences the transforming work of the Spirit. Jacob was eventually transformed into Israel. Furthermore, when Jacob became Israel God's testimony was produced. When David vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, he vowed to the One who is the God of transformation and the God of testimony. Transformation will always lead to God's testimony. If we vow to "the Mighty One of Jacob" we are saying, "Towards me, God is the mighty God of transformation. Towards the church, His habitation, He is the mighty

God of testimony. I vow to this very God!” This is the beginning of our exercise in maturity.

The Mature One Does Not Have His Own House

The psalmist continues, “I shall not go into the tent of my house; I shall not go up onto the couch of my bed; I shall not give sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids; until I find a place for Jehovah, a tabernacle for the Mighty One of Jacob” (v. 3-5). This is very hard to understand, and we must apply this in the way of experience. The psalmist, quoting David, says, “I shall not go into the tent of my house.” The word “tent” here can also be translated “tabernacle.” In the Old Testament the tabernacle of God was His dwelling place. Therefore the phrase “the tent of my house” actually means “the tabernacle, God’s dwelling place, of my house.” But how can *our* house be the tabernacle? We would think that each of us has our own house, and God’s tabernacle is a separate matter. But David said, “the tent of my house.” David was a mature person who could testify that his house was God’s tabernacle, and God’s tabernacle was his house. In other words, David did not have a habitation separate and apart from God’s dwelling place. The psalmist, by quoting David, applies these words to himself. His own house and God’s dwelling place are the same. How many of us can say this? We would normally think, “There is God’s house, and there is my house. God has His tabernacle, and I have my own house.” But here in this psalm a mature person declares, “I don’t have my own house. My house is God’s house. I don’t have anything for myself. All that I have is consumed by God for His habitation.”

The Mature One’s Consecration: “My House and God’s House are the Same”

When we see what the psalmist is describing, we must admit that we feel very inadequate. The psalmist was truly a consecrated person. To most of us, our consecration is always in the principle of

an “exchange.” When we give something to the Lord we expect that the Lord will reward us. If we offer something to the Lord then He must give us something back in return. Not many of us can say, “My house *is* God’s tabernacle.” To say this means that there is no other motive. There is no thought of an exchange. A mature person’s consecration is like a marriage. There is no thought between a husband and wife, “Whatever I do for you, I must get something back in return.” Yet this is often our concept in the church life.

For example, we may tell the Lord, “I will separate certain time-slots for You: the Lord’s Table meeting, the prayer meeting, and one night to have a home meeting or to preach the gospel. In return, Lord, You must preserve my job. If possible, give me a raise. Also, I am about to buy a car, so please give me the best price.” Because we give a certain amount of time to the Lord we expect a blessing in return. This shows that we don’t have a view according to the Lord’s desire. When a person grows to maturity he no longer has his “own time.” He doesn’t have his “own wealth.” He doesn’t even have his “own house” or his “own property.” His house and God’s house are the same. His possessions are God’s possessions. Everything that he has belongs to God. In fact, it is more accurate to say that everything he has *is* God’s house. Everything he has *is* God’s testimony. And although he does not expect something in return, God’s possessions are now *his* possessions. Because of his maturity, whatever belongs to God belongs also to him. This is the consecration of a mature person. When we are consecrated in such a way, then our house is truly the Lord’s tabernacle. This means that we are fully for the church life.

For this reason we should be careful of saying that we are too “tight” financially, especially those of us who serve the Lord full-time. This may show that our house and God’s tabernacle are two different things in our concept. Sometimes when we offer to the Lord financially we think that we are generous. We may even feel that we are offering too much. We should never consider ourselves generous in our offering to the Lord. To think this way shows that our understanding is wrong. The Lord would tell us, “Don’t think that you have offered so much. All that you have belongs to Me. It

is Mine anyway.” We need to become mature so that we can have a full and complete consecration to the Lord. When we arrive at true maturity we no longer separate what is ours from what is His. We no longer think, “This belongs to me, and that belongs to Him.” Nor do we think, “I have given something to the Lord. Now I am entitled to some kind of blessing in return.” When we reach the stage of maturity we realize, “The Lord’s tabernacle is my house, and my house is His tabernacle. I do not have my own house or my own life. The church life is just *my* life.”

The Mature One Has No Rest

If the psalmist realizes that his house and God’s house are the same, then why can’t he be restful? Why must he be so desperate? A house should be a place of rest. We might tell the psalmist, “Not only do you have a house, but your house is God’s house. Now you can rest. There is no need to be so desperate.” But the psalmist would tell us, “No! In God’s house I will not go up to my bed! I cannot have any rest! I will not even give sleep to my eyes!” Previously in Psalm 131 he had been brought to a quiet restfulness. Yet now he is determined not to go up to his bed. Instead of finding rest he is desperate for God’s house. He would say, “I see the dwelling place of God. I am for God’s house and God’s testimony. My house and God’s house are the same. Because of this, I forbid myself to have any rest! I am burdened! I am charged! I am desperate! Oh Lord, You have a tabernacle, but where is the substance? Where is the reality of Your testimony?”

The demand of sleep is powerful. It is not even possible for anyone to go without sleep for more than a few days. Yet the psalmist declares, “I love God’s dwelling place to the uttermost. I am just consumed by His house. Besides the Lord’s testimony I have nothing. My house is just God’s tabernacle, and His tabernacle is my house. But in my experience there is no bed here. His house is supposed to be a place of rest, but where is the reality? His tabernacle is here, but where is the substance of the tabernacle? Without the substance, how can I rest?”

Today God's tabernacle is the church life. To be consumed for God's house is to be consumed for the church life. But do we have this desperation? We are here in the church life, but where is the substance of the church life? We have heard so much, we understand so much, and we can declare so much, but where is the reality? When we realize how short we are we will become desperate and cry out, "Until the reality comes, I will have no rest! I will not give sleep to my eyes, nor slumber to my eyelids! I will struggle! I will fight to bring in the substance of the Lord's testimony!" This is the sign of true maturity.

When we enter into the maturity that is depicted in this psalm we can no longer be satisfied with merely being a blessing to the church. Instead we strive for the entire church life to come into reality. This causes us to cry out, "Lord, I will not give myself any rest! I will not close my eyes until You gain Your habitation!" As we have seen, this prayer is to "the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 2). In other words we pray, "Oh Lord, You are the mighty God of transformation! You are the mighty God of testimony! But where is the reality of Your habitation? Where is the substance of Your tabernacle? This is what I am fighting for! I am fighting to bring the whole church life into this reality!"

The Mature One Rises Up and Refuses to Complain or Be Indifferent

When we were covering the stage of enlargement in the previous message we spoke a particular word to the younger ones. Now we need to speak a word to the older ones: "Rise up! Fight for the reality of the Lord's testimony!" After being in the church life for a long time we often have many complaints. We complain that there is not enough love in the church. We complain about how our spiritual talk in the church life is so different from our practical living. We complain about the lack in the saints' humanity. But the church can never be built up by murmuring or complaining, even if these complaints are justified. Furthermore, the church can never be built up if we have become indifferent after being in the church life for

so long. Yes, we may be discouraged, but it is because things are discouraging that we need to rise up! Yes, there are many things that bother us in the church life, but those very things should cause us to rise up! We need to rise up just like David, who refused to rest until the Lord's testimony was constituted with spiritual reality.

The Mature One Struggles that the Lord's Testimony Would Be Filled with Reality

After portraying his desperation the psalmist continues, "Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar" (v. 6). Here he is referring to the ark of the covenant. The ark was taken by the Philistines in battle, but eventually they returned it to the Israelites (1 Sam. 4-6). "Jaar" is short for "Kiriath-jearim," which is the place where the ark of the covenant rested until King David brought it to Jerusalem (1 Sam. 7:1-2; 2 Sam. 6:1-19). This means that there was a time when the ark of the covenant was actually missing from God's tabernacle. There was a time when the setting was right, but the content, the reality, was missing. This corresponds to how we often feel about the church life. For example, every Lord's Day morning we have the Lord's Table, in which we remember the Lord and worship the Father. Then every Tuesday night we come together to pray. We may have a serving life, and we may have the preaching of the gospel. Our setting seems right, because we are the tabernacle of God. We have the outer court, the Holy Place, and even the Holy of Holies. Yet we are short of the ark of testimony. We are short of the substance and reality of the church life.

Isn't this our situation today? Concerning many churches we would have the realization, "Everything about our setting is right, but where is the substance?" This psalm shows us that the substance of God's tabernacle is the ark of testimony. Without the ark, the tabernacle is empty. It contains a void. It becomes short of reality. Therefore in this psalm we see a mature person who is struggling. He does not struggle for how he can grow, how he can be used by the Lord, or how he can become a blessing. He has

already gained all of these things through his previous experiences, but he is still not satisfied. He cries out, “Lord, I am not just here to be a blessing to others. I am not just here to render the church a supply of life and enjoyment. Lord, I am after the ark of testimony! I am after the substance of the church life!” This should be our struggle. We should struggle that the church life would be filled with reality.

**The Mature One Produces the Reality of
the Lord’s Testimony, in which Christ Alone is Seen**

The psalmist continues, “We will go into His tabernacle; we will worship at His footstool” (v. 7). Here we see a very significant progression in this psalm, from “the tent of my house” (v. 3) to “His tabernacle” (v. 7). Formerly the psalmist spoke of “the tent of my house,” with “the couch of my bed.” But now, because of his struggling, the substance and reality of God’s tabernacle has been gained. This means that to the psalmist there is no more “I.” There is no more “my house” or “my bed.” We must realize that when the reality of God’s habitation comes, the “I” disappears. When the ark of testimony is produced, then all the individuals are gone. There is nothing left but God’s tabernacle. For us, this means that the Lord becomes the real center of the church life. We no longer have “my tent.” We no longer have anything for ourselves. We only have “His tabernacle.” We disappear, and He alone is seen. We should pray, “Dear Lord, grant us this reality. How long must we wait? How long until we reach this stage? How long until we have a church life where You are everything, where there is only You, and nothing but You? Lord, we want You as the ark of testimony to be the center and reality of the church life.”

In the church life there should be nothing and no one but Christ. The Lord must be the center, substance, and reality of the church life. He is the ark of the covenant. We know from the Bible that the ark contained three items: the tablets of law, the hidden manna, and the budding rod. This shows us that we need Christ in three aspects. We need Him as the reality of the tablets of law, which

means that He rules the church. We need Him as the reality of the hidden manna, which means that He is our very life supply. We need Him as the reality of the budded rod, which means that He operates within the church life as the resurrection power. When the church life is healthy everyone disappears, and only Christ is here. In the church we should see nothing but Christ.

In Matthew 17, after Christ was transfigured on the mountain, the Bible says that His disciples “saw no one except Jesus Himself alone” (Matt. 17:8). Eventually the church must come to such a place. Only when there is “no one except Jesus Himself alone” will God be satisfied. Only then will God be able to say about the church life, “This is My tabernacle! This is My house and My testimony!” May the Lord have mercy on us. If we truly see that this is what the Lord desires we will feel very heavy within. We have all loved the Lord for so many years now, yet we may be short of this desire. But if we are mature, then we must have the same longing and struggle that this psalmist had, and that David had before him. We must say, “I will not sleep. I will not slumber. I will not give myself any rest. But I will fight, and I will struggle. I will locate the ark of testimony, and I will bring it into the house of God. I will produce the substance and reality and bring it into the church life. Then in the church life there will be nothing but Christ!”

The Mature One’s Exercise Provides the Lord a Way to Enter into His Rest

After the reality of God’s tabernacle is produced, the psalmist continues, “Arise, O Jehovah, unto Your resting place, You and the Ark of Your strength” (v. 8). In verse six the psalmist said, “We found it [the ark] in the fields of Jaar.” In other words, by his struggling the psalmist produced the ark of testimony, the reality and substance of the Lord’s habitation. This means that he has provided the Lord a way to enter into His resting place. He can now tell the Lord, “Arise, O Jehovah, unto Your resting place, You and the Ark of Your strength.” In this verse the Lord finds His rest. Here He is finally satisfied. He can say, “I have gained My build-

ing. I have gained My testimony. I have gained what I have desired. Now I can rest.” The psalmist has gone through a tremendous process to be able to provide the Lord such a rest. All of his experiences, all of his realizations, all of his struggling, and all of his tears eventually produce God’s own rest. After all of the psalmist’s experiences of consecration, transformation, and growth unto maturity, it is the Lord who is now resting. As we have seen, when the reality of God’s habitation is produced, the “I” disappears and there is no one but Christ. When the church life is in such a healthy condition, the church’s strength is in Christ alone. The strength of the church life must be the ark of the covenant. The ark is Christ Himself, with His ruling, His resurrection power, and His life supply. Through the exercise of maturity as depicted in this psalm, the church life is upheld by the ark, that is, by Christ alone. Praise the Lord for this!

Even though these matters are deep, we should still have at least some understanding of what is revealed here. We need to pray, “Oh Lord, I give myself to You that I would become fully mature. I want my house to be Your tabernacle, and Your tabernacle to be my house. I want my life and the church life to be one, to the fullest degree possible. And even more, Lord, I desire to produce the substance and reality of the church life. I desire that we would have Your heavenly ruling, Your resurrection power, and Your divine life supply. I pray, Lord, that by my exercise in maturity You could enter into Your rest.”

We will conclude with verses thirteen and fourteen of this psalm: “For Jehovah has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” This is the Lord’s desire, an eternal habitation. The psalmist in his maturity has brought something eternal into the Lord’s testimony. The Lord has His resting place “forever.” May we all exercise to bring in the substance and reality of the Lord’s testimony. May the church life become so healthy that only Christ Himself is seen. And may we all desire to grow until we reach this stage of maturity, so that we can exercise to bring the Lord into His rest forever.

**PSALM 133: THE TESTIMONY OF
THE CHURCH LIFE IN MATURITY (1)**

Our Maturity Results in a Glorious Oneness

Psalm 133 is a psalm we all know very well because we often sing it as a hymn. However, we may not truly know this psalm as it was meant to be known. Psalm 133 was meant to be a display of maturity, not a display of emotion. But we often enjoy this psalm in a very emotional way. We sing, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Then after singing it so joyfully in a meeting we may think that we are one. We need to realize that this is not an emotional psalm. Rather, it is a display of the maturity that results from all the previous experiences in the Psalms of Ascent.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!” (v. 1). How is it possible for us to experience the oneness described in this verse? We can only be one by exercising our maturity as portrayed in Psalm 132, in which Christ becomes everything and we disappear. In other words, we can only have the genuine oneness when we lose our individuality. When we are no longer individuals, when we no longer have anything for our selves, then together we can become the Lord’s habitation in which we dwell together in unity. This is to have the display of maturity.

We have all tasted this oneness from time to time, but it seems we are never able to maintain it. Our experience of oneness is often inconsistent. However, we should not be discouraged and think that oneness is only theoretical. Oneness comes from our maturity in life. It is not theoretical, but it is something we must grow into. As the Lord continues to transform us and work Himself into us, and as we strive for the Lord to be the substance of the church life so that He can enter into His rest, then eventually the true oneness of the Lord’s testimony will be produced among us. We will have what is spoken of in this psalm: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!”

**Our Oneness Causes Us
to Enjoy the Divine Anointing**

Psalm 133 continues, “It is like the fine oil upon the head that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron’s beard, that ran down upon the hem of his garments” (v. 2). This fine oil that was poured upon Aaron’s head was the anointing oil, as described in Exodus 30:22-33. According to this psalm, what should characterize our unity? Our unity should be accompanied by the enjoyment of the divine anointing. For us to be under the divine anointing means that we are filled and saturated with the living presence of Christ. Even though we may not have this consistently, we often have a foretaste of this in our meetings or in our fellowship with the saints. Sometimes we have the deep realization of the Lord’s presence because the divine anointing has come in and saturated us. Then we become more than joyful. We think, “Oh, how rich! How marvelous!” We may even enter into a kind of ecstasy, to the point where we forget who we are. Such a deep sensation shows that we are under the divine anointing.

**For This Oneness We Need
the Headship and Person of Christ**

The enjoyment and experience of the divine anointing comes from our oneness. According to this psalm, the anointing oil runs down upon the head. This means that we need the headship of Christ. The anointing oil comes down upon the head, and then runs down from the head to the body. In the Bible the head also refers to the person. When we have Christ’s headship, we also have His person. The oneness described in this psalm can only be displayed in the church life if all of the saints are in submission to Christ’s headship. Every saint must be under Christ’s headship for true oneness to be realized. This oneness will cause us to enjoy the divine anointing.

For this reason we need to remember that oneness is not merely an emotional experience. We tend to enjoy this psalm in an emo-

tional way, but then we live our own life apart from the Lord's headship. This can never work to bring in the Lord's blessing. If we want such a reality of oneness, then we need the experiences from Psalm 132. Our house should be God's tabernacle. Eventually we lose "our house" and only His tabernacle remains. This means that we lose everything of ourselves. But when we experience the ark of testimony as the reality of God's habitation, then in such a condition we can testify, "Behold! Oh, behold! How pleasant it is! Look at all the dear saints! They are all just for Christ! They are under His headship! They don't express themselves! They only express the person of Christ!" It is when the saints are in such a condition that we can truly testify, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!" When we are all living Christ, taking Him as our person and as our Head, then the church life becomes glorious. We enjoy oneness with the divine anointing.

For This Oneness We Need the Maturity of Christ with His Priestly Serving Life

The ointment that was poured upon Aaron's head ran down to his beard. In the Bible the beard signifies maturity, because a young man cannot grow a beard until he becomes mature. For the ointment to run down upon the beard signifies that we who are in oneness not only possess Christ's headship and person, but also His maturity. Furthermore, this is not just any beard, but "Aaron's beard." Aaron was the high priest. "Aaron's beard" represents the maturity of a priestly serving life. A mature priest is one who brings God to man and man to God. This should be our serving life. We must have the headship, the person, the maturity, and the serving life of Christ. Aaron's beard represents a mature exercise in the priestly serving life. When all of the saints are exercised in such a way the church life becomes a corporate serving life. In such a condition we have the oneness which brings in the divine anointing.

What is described in these verses should become very practical for us. We often feel it is too much for us to serve in the church life, even for just one time a week. We especially look down upon the

practical serving, such as cleaning the hall, setting up chairs, or mowing the lawn. If this is the case, then how can we have “Aaron’s beard” among us? It often seems instead that we have “Jacob’s beard,” because we always murmur and complain. We complain that some saints do too much, while others do too little. But this is contrary to Psalm 133. We should desire to see a harmonious church life in maturity, with the divine ointment flowing down upon us, so that we can declare, “Behold! How good and how pleasant it is!” For this to happen we need to have Christ as our Head and as our person. We need to grow until Christ Himself is our maturity. This maturity will cause us to serve as a priest in the church life. When there are many saints among us who exercise in maturity, then the church life will become a priestly serving life.

Suppose all of the saints were desirous to serve, whether by preaching the gospel and having home gatherings, or by cleaning the meeting hall and mowing the lawn. Then we would surely have “Aaron’s beard” among us. This would allow us to experience the flow of the divine anointing. There would be no murmuring, complaining, withdrawing, or backsliding. All of the saints would exercise with the headship of Christ, the person of Christ, the maturity of Christ, and the priestly serving life of Christ. Then we would all declare, “Oh, how good and how pleasant it is!” We would enter into the rich enjoyment of oneness as described in this psalm.

Our Oneness Produces a Marvelous Testimony of Christ

Eventually the anointing oil ran down from Aaron’s beard to the “hem of his garments.” A person’s garments signifies his outward expression, his testimony. For the ointment to reach the “hem of his garments” means that eventually there is a wonderful testimony produced from our oneness in the church life. The divine anointing reaches the very hem of our garments. The church life becomes a glorious display. On one hand it is a display of our maturity, but it is Christ Himself who is expressed. When people look at our oneness they see the marvelous testimony of Christ.

**In this One Testimony We Experience
the Freshness of Christ's Resurrection**

Psalm 133 continues, “Like the dew of Hermon that came down upon the mountains of Zion” (v. 3a). Our oneness is like the “dew of Hermon.” Jerusalem is surrounded by mountains, and Mount Hermon is the highest of them all. Mount Hermon in the Bible signifies the ascended Christ. We know that Christ went through death and resurrection, and now He is in ascension. In His ascension He is likened to “dew.” Dew is produced after a cold, dark night. The Lord passed through the cold, dark night of death and entered into resurrection and ascension. In ascension the Lord now possesses the freshness of resurrection. The dew of Hermon is the ascended Christ with the freshness and fragrance of His resurrection.

The dew of Hermon descended upon the mountains of Zion. Saints who are in the stage of maturity are all like mountains. But although there are many mountains there is only one Zion, which means that there is only one testimony. In this testimony we experience the descending dew, which is the freshness of the resurrected Christ. In the stage of maturity we eventually see nothing but resurrection in the church life. Every dear saint becomes a testimony of resurrection. We no longer see the flesh, the self-life, or the natural things; instead we only see the resurrected Christ. Based upon our oneness in maturity, the ascended Christ renders us the freshness of His resurrection for us to enjoy and experience. Praise the Lord for such a church life!

**The Lord Commands His Blessing
upon the Church Life in Maturity**

Psalm 133 concludes, “For there Jehovah commanded the blessing: Life forever” (v. 3b). This verse is so sweet and so precious. When the church life enters into maturity the Lord commands His blessing. In His testimony there is life forever more. Just a glimpse of this will make our heart leap for joy! After reading Psalm 133

we should all pray, “Oh Lord, we don’t want to be emotional about Your testimony. Grant us the reality of oneness under Your divine anointing! We want to exercise with maturity until we have the display of such a marvelous church life!”

**PSALM 134: THE TESTIMONY OF
THE CHURCH LIFE IN MATURITY (2)**

**In Maturity the Saints Become
the Servants of the Lord**

Psalm 134 is the final psalm in our spiritual ascent up Mount Zion. It begins, “Bless Jehovah now, all you servants of Jehovah who stand by night in the house of Jehovah” (v. 1). After all of the previous experiences the psalmist is full of feeling, because he has come so far in his ascent. He can remember that once he was such a low person, in constant distress and full of deception. But now he has become different. By his growth in life he has entered into maturity, so he says, “Bless Jehovah!”

Furthermore, the psalmist’s exercise has helped bring the Lord’s testimony into maturity. This is the significance of “all you servants of Jehovah.” When we enter into the experience of this psalm, it is not only we ourselves who are different, but all of the saints are different. The entire church life is different. By their enjoyment of the divine anointing and the freshness of Christ’s resurrection, all of the saints possess a certain degree of maturity. Psalm 134 does not speak of the maturity of one individual but of the entire Body of Christ. The servants of the Lord here are not just the leading ones. When the church life is brought into maturity every saint becomes a servant of the Lord.

The Church in Maturity Awaits the Lord’s Return

Here at the end of the Psalms of Ascent, the church as the Bride has made herself ready and is awaiting the Lord’s return. It seems that all of our experiences from the previous Psalms of As-

cent are over. The afflictions and difficulties are over. Even the experiences of growth and maturity are over. We are just here in the church life waiting for Him to return. The servants of the Lord “stand by night in the house of Jehovah.” The dawn has not yet come and it is still night outside, because the Lord has not yet come back. We have no other hope in this world. The only thing we can look forward to is for the Lord to return.

At this stage the reality of the church life has been manifested. The maturity of the church life is displayed in full. Yet in such a wonderful situation our only hope is, “Lord, please come back.” Here we see that all the servants of the Lord are standing and waiting for the Lord’s return. To “stand” means to have a diligent exercise. Not one of the saints is at rest. All of the saints are diligently standing, watching, and waiting for the Lord to come back. Our cry for His return is a corporate cry. When we reach this stage all of the saints cry out together, “Oh, Lord, You must come back!”

The servants here are standing in “the house of Jehovah,” which today is the church life. The Lord will not come back because of one individual’s maturity. The Lord will only come back when the entire church has entered into maturity and has expressed the desire for Him to return. In Psalm 134 all the saints in the church life display maturity. They are all servants of the Lord. They are all crying out together, “Lord, come back! The night has been too long!” Even after we have entered into the highest enjoyment in the church life we should still seek something more. Even when we are enjoying the divine anointing and the freshness of Christ in resurrection, we should still say, “Lord, come back. Yes, we have the highest enjoyment, but Lord, we are not satisfied. We still expect something even more glorious to come. Oh Lord, we stand and wait for Your return!”

By Our Maturity We Become a Blessing to the Lord

The psalm continues, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord” (v. 2). To lift up our hands is to pray. In the church

life we should be those who pray and who bless the Lord. This phrase, “Bless the Lord,” is precious. When we are immature it seems that we are always asking for the Lord to bless us. But after all of our previous experiences there is now a corporate testimony. There is a display of maturity in the church life in which we lift up our hands, interceding and praying for the Lord to come back. As we pray for the Lord’s return we say, “Lord, we bless You.” By our maturity we have become a blessing to the Lord.

**The Lord Blesses Us from
the Church Life in Maturity**

Psalm 134 ends, “May Jehovah, who made heaven and earth, bless you from Zion” (v. 3). This is the conclusion of the Psalms of Ascent. At the beginning of these psalms Jehovah was the Creator. Now at the end of these psalms this very Creator blesses us out of Zion. He blesses us out of a glorious church life where He and His people are one. May we all become such a blessing to the Lord, and may the Lord bless us from the glorious church life in maturity. Praise the Lord!

PART II

THE SONG
OF
SONGS

CHAPTER ONE

THE SONG OF ALL SONGS

“The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine. Your anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance; your name is like ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you. Draw me; we will run after you—the king has brought me into his chambers—we will be glad and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you.” (Song of Songs 1:1-4)

INTRODUCTION

In this message we are going to consider the matter of our Christian experience as portrayed in the Song of Songs. Every sentence in the Song of Songs portrays a spiritual experience. If we identify with what is shared, it indicates that we have had the experience. If, however, we are puzzled by what is shared, it probably indicates that we have not entered into that experience yet. But all of us can learn from this book. If we are among those who desire a deeper experience of the Lord, we need to get into the Song of Songs.

THIS BOOK IS FOR OUR ENTIRE LIFE

The Song of Songs is a book for our whole life. It reveals all the experiences we will have to go through. It is impossible for us to avoid the experiences revealed in these eight chapters. No matter how deep, how excellent, or how rich our experiences are, they all should be located within these chapters. Moreover, no matter how heavy our spiritual burden is, or how wide-ranging our spiritual work is, all the relevant spiritual principles can be found in this book. These eight chapters are so rich that every verse and every sentence can be applied to our situation and can become our help.

As we follow the Lord, this book serves as a wonderful guide. It shows us where we are right now, what experiences we should have, and how we should go on. This book can greatly help us to have a strong and positive experience of pursuing Christ. The Song of Songs also reminds us that we are not matured yet—we have to continue to give ourselves to the Lord and renew our consecration to the Lord continually so that the Lord can take us on stage by stage.

We are easily satisfied. If we receive a little blessing or enjoyment or experience, we are satisfied, and if there is a little impact or effect from our serving, we are satisfied. We are unable to contain too much blessing from the Lord. Sometimes the Lord appears to us and we do not recognize Him. Sometimes God disciplines us and we do not realize it. Sometimes we do not know why we are in the dark and have lost the presence of the Lord. And sometimes we do not understand why we are in the heavens experiencing the riches of the Lord.

All of these situations indicate that we still have a long way to go. We need to pay a further price to go on. This is why the Lord says, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the fields, not to rouse up or awaken my love, until she pleases” (3:5). The Lord must wait until we please.

A normal seeking Christian should labor on this book. We should be familiar with it and pay the price to experience all the riches revealed in it. If we are equipped in this way, it will be easy for us to work with the Lord in our environment. We will understand when

“the day dawns” and “the shadows flee away,” and we will be able to thank and praise the Lord rather than being bewildered or stumbled. We will be able to tell the Lord, “Oh Lord, thank You for this time and this situation. It is not in vain, and my tears are not in vain.”

**THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF
THE SONG OF SONGS: CHRIST**

It is also significant that this book is timeless. It is always fresh. After we finish its first chapter, we may think we already possess the experience revealed there. However, every time we read it, we should feel refreshed and more attracted than before. This book brings us to Christ as the center of God’s eternal purpose. All of God’s working is focused on Christ. God wants us to gain only Christ, to experience only Christ, and to enjoy only Christ. This is a book about “only Christ.” It shows us how Christ can become our subjective experience. That is the reason this book is so valuable.

**OUR LIFE SHOULD BE
THE SONG OF SONGS**

The Song of Songs is the story of human lives. It begins with, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” The “songs” of this book are human lives. Everyone has his own life, and each one’s life is a song. Every saved person’s life is a song before the Lord. It is impossible to have a relationship with the Lord that is without any spiritual “music.”

The experience of a normal Christian before the Lord is a song of songs. There are countless songs in the world, and everyone is pursuing one of these songs and composing one of these songs. However, our Lord leads us to the most valuable song. It is a song of experiencing God. Some people are pursuing money on the earth, so money becomes the song of their lives. Some are pursuing power, and thus power becomes their song. We Christians need to enjoy the song that is above every other song, the song of songs.

Everyone has his own pursuit, his own plan, and his own desire. In this book, however, the Lord tells us that we should evaluate our lives according to our relationship with Him. Only a life loving the Lord is a valuable life. Only a life loving the Lord is the song of songs. Only a life loving the Lord has eternal value throughout eternity. Only a life loving the Lord is a life full of enjoyment. While others are pursuing the joy and the songs of their lives, the Lord tells us, “Without Me, without My song, without My music, your life is void and useless and has no value before God. Such a life eventually has no meaning on this earth.”

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE SONG OF SONGS IS PRECIOUS AND VALUABLE

There are many saints who love the Lord and give everything to Him. When you meet them, you know they have their song of songs, and you, as a Jesus lover, also realize you have your own song of songs. If you don't have a good relationship with the Lord or the church, you may feel that the Lord is nicer to others. You may feel that their Lord is sweeter and that their song is more pleasant. If you have a healthy relationship with the Lord, however, you will realize, “The Lord is not only yours; He is mine, too. The value of my Lord is not less than yours. The Lord is your lover and He is mine, too. I am experiencing my own song, and it is also a song of songs.”

Praise the Lord that there is no respect of persons with Him. You should not despise yourself. You shouldn't regret that you do not seem to possess the gifts or talents of others. You should only care for your relationship with the Lord. If there is love between you and the Lord, you will feel you have the most beautiful song. This song is special to you. As long as the relationship exists, no matter what you like or what you pursue, you will find out the Lord is the Song of Songs, for He is the most precious one to you.

THE LORD HIMSELF IS OUR SONG OF SONGS

The experience of the Shulammitte woman in chapter 1 is the Song of Songs. Her experience in chapter 8 is still the Song of Songs. No matter where we are, no matter how many years we have before the Lord, no matter how young or how mature we are spiritually, as long as we are a normal Christian we should have the Lord as our Song of Songs. To live a life as a lover of the Lord is to pursue the song that is above all songs.

Strikingly, this book stresses the cross and the work of the cross. However, the beginning of our Christian experience is not focused on the cross, but on a fantastic song. When we meet a nonbeliever, we should have the feeling, “Thank You, Lord. The song within me is more delightful. The song within me is sweeter. The song within me is the song of songs.” This is a normal condition of a Christian. If a person doesn’t know he has a song within him, his relationship with the Lord is not healthy.

Brothers and sisters, you should let Christ be your total satisfaction all your Christian life. Your situation may change. The stages of your human life may advance. How you serve and work may vary. However, you have to remember that the Lord is always the center of everything and the reality of everything. When you follow the Lord and give everything to Him, He gives you nothing else but Himself. Eventually you will get nothing from Him but Himself. In the beginning, He was everything. In the end, He is still going to be everything. Life without Him is completely meaningless.

In 1:1 we can see that Solomon’s song is the Song of Songs. The book is of Solomon. All of the stages, all of the experiences, and all of the serving are related to Solomon. This indicates that every stage of ours is the Lord, every experience of ours is the Lord, and every service of ours is the Lord.

**TO LOSE THE LORD AS OUR FIRST LOVE
IS TO LOSE THE SONG OF SONGS**

Whenever you lose the sweetness of your relationship with the Lord, you have fallen. If you lose your first love toward the Lord, you cannot tell others that you have the song of songs. Whenever your focus becomes your serving life or your need to be equipped in the truth, but not the Lord Himself, then you have lost your song of songs. Other things, even good and necessary things, have taken the place of the Lord. Only one who lives before the Lord can tell others that he has the song of songs.

What kind of life does the Lord want us to have? He desires that we have a life with the song of songs. Although in these eight chapters the Shulammitte experiences failure and weakness, those experiences all occur under His sovereignty as a part of this song. The Lord desires that we would always be able to tell everyone, “I have a song of songs. My Lord is the best. My Lord is the fairest. He is all and in all. My serving is according to the Lord I love. My prayer and labor are according to the Lord I love. My life and breath are according to the Lord I love. Today everything that I have is according to the Lord I love.” Such a person is one who lives in the reality of the Song of Songs.

Can you tell others that you live in the Song of Songs? If you cannot, you are not in a normal and healthy situation. Perhaps in the past, according to this book, you have advanced several chapters in experience. However, if you cannot say that the Lord is your song of songs at this moment, you can no longer say you have a place within this book.

“LET HIM KISS ME”

Verse 2 says, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” Our Christian experience begins with, “Let him kiss me.” It begins with love. What a beginning this is! It is not from us but from the Lord. A person may be saved but living a religious life, perhaps just making meetings on Sundays. One day, without any particular rea-

son, there appears a Him who takes that person beyond all these things. Oh, this person will now cry, “Let Him! Let Him!” for he is touching the Him in the universe. He now suddenly feels that his life is full of Him. He doesn’t even have to say, “My Lord.” He feels it doesn’t need any explanation. When we have Him, our life is different. We are in love. We have His love. Now we love Him, and it seems superfluous to explain.

A person who doesn’t love the Lord is very sloppy and casual. On the contrary, a person who loves the Lord is sensitive with longing. When he talks about the Lord, he is full of feelings: “He is so precious. He has ravished my heart. I miss Him.” You don’t have to tell him how often or how long he should pray. He always feels, “Oh, Lord, I love You.” When he goes to school, he will say, “Lord, I love You.” When he goes to work, he will say, “Lord, I love You. I desire that You would kiss me with the kisses of Your mouth. I long to see You face to face. We are bound together. Oh, Lord, I want to consecrate everything to You.”

This should be your experience all your life. You should live in this feeling all your days. “Let Him.” You do not have to explain who He is. He is the One who has ravished your heart. You and He have an unspeakable, sweet, and sublime relationship.

“FOR YOUR LOVE IS BETTER THAN WINE”

The lover continues in verse 2, “For your love is better than wine.” This one who just said “him” now says “your.” In this lover’s world, there is only “Him,” “You,” and “me.” “Him” is the Lord. “You” is also the Lord. What the lover wants is “You”—the Lord. What she wants is “Him”—the Lord. This thought is similar to a verse from the Psalms: “Whom do I have in heaven but You? And there is none upon the earth that I desire beside You” (Psa. 73:25). The Song of Songs begins with “let him” and continues with “for your.” At first the seeker was praying. Now she is testifying, “I have but one world. Whether in my testimony or in my prayer, I am focused on the Lord. Besides Him I have nothing in my life, for His love is better than wine.”

**“WINE” REPRESENTS THE THINGS
THAT ONCE SATISFIED US**

Wine represents something that used to satisfy us and give us enjoyment. We all had some kind of wine that we thought was the best thing in our lives. However, now we feel, “Lord, Your love is better than any wine I have ever had. When I have Your love, everything I experienced before fades away.” How do we live this life of the Song of Songs? We have to ask ourselves, “Do I still have any wine that is better than His love?” If we have a normal pursuing life, we will have a deep feeling that there is nothing better than the rich love of the Lord. No matter how attractive or glorious something in the world may seem, the Lord’s love is so much better. Whenever we touch the Lord, we can testify, “Lord, Your love is better than any other wine on this earth.”

**THE LORD INITIALLY APPEARS
TO US IN HIS LOVE**

Our Lord cannot reveal Himself to us all at once, or we would not be able to stand before Him. He is too perfect. He is holy and righteous. Eventually as we come to know Him further, we will experience His judging. But if we were to experience all His judging from the time we began to pursue Him, we would die not only spiritually but also physically. If He were to reveal all His glory to us, no one could survive. When the Lord appeared to Isaiah, he said, “Woe is me, for I am undone!” (Isa. 6:5). The Lord cannot fully reveal Himself to someone who just begins to love Him. So He at first appears in love to sustain His seeker. Thus, at the beginning of our Christian life, our first experience is of His love. In His love He attracts us. In this way He encourages our hearts to pursue Him. When we pray to Him just a little, “Let Him kiss me,” He comes immediately.

The beginning is so good: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” But it is not followed by, “For you yourself are better than wine.” Instead it is followed by, “For your love is better than wine.”

At this stage we are not deeply touching the Lord Himself. We are only touching His love. When we are weak and ask for forgiveness, the Lord tells us, “I love you. I forgive you.” Since we have a very limited capacity at this point, the Lord can only allow us to touch His love. We still do not know how rich He is. At this stage we have yet to discover the riches of His person.

If we want to enjoy the Lord Himself, we need to pay a price to spend time before the Lord. How much we see of Him depends on our capacity. The vision and experiences we can receive depend on our measure of life. The more we grow, the more He will show us who He is. He is boundless. We need to have a yearning for more growth in life. Eventually, we will find out we are able to experience the Lord Himself.

**“YOUR ANOINTING OILS HAVE
A PLEASANT FRAGRANCE”**

Verse 3 goes on to say, “Your anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance.” The anointing oils refer to the Lord Himself as the One who has passed through all the processes. When you are still young in the Lord, He is very tender towards you. He gives you His love and you enjoy Him as the processed God. He then becomes oils to anoint you and blend with you. It seems that He forgets His holiness, His glory, His honor, and His might and becomes a humble One, entering into your spirit for your enjoyment, to blend with you. During this process you will enjoy Him and experience Him as the anointing oils, and He will transfuse Himself into you.

**“YOUR NAME IS LIKE
OINTMENT POURED FORTH”**

Verse 3 continues, “Your name is like ointment poured forth.” This name is actually the Lord’s work. As the result of His work, He has the name that is above every name. According to the book of Philippians, the Lord “humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross. Therefore also God highly

exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). The Lord’s name has been produced as a result of all His work. Hence, His name refers to His work.

Initially, when we began to love the Lord, we only sought His love. Gradually, the Lord Himself was constituted into us, bringing Himself into us as the anointing oil. He was so tender, not judging us at all, even though we knew our weakness and sin that were contrary to Him. We also knew of His work, His achievements, and especially His salvation. We knew the Lord who loved us, went to the cross for us, died for us, resurrected for us, and now lives in us to become our life. Now He is our joy, our satisfaction, our enjoyment, our supply, and our strength. What we experience now is the work of the Lord as a name like ointment poured forth. At this point, however, our experience has still not gotten into the depths.

“THE VIRGINS LOVE YOU”

Verse 3 continues, “Therefore the virgins love you.” When you had no heart for the Lord, you did not have virgins for companions; you only had friends. You could talk to your friends about all sorts of things, like movies, sports, or even your plans for the future. When you began to love the Lord, however, you found out there are so many who love the Lord just like you. These are the virgins. They are chaste and pure. They care about no one but the Lord. Those who have not touched the Lord can only get into gossip and reasoning together. The ones who have touched the Lord are also able to touch others’ love towards the Lord.

WHEN YOU BEGIN TO LOVE THE LORD, YOU DISCOVER A BOND WITH OTHERS WHO ALSO LOVE HIM

Brothers and sisters, if you serve without touching the Lord, your service may keep you occupied, but you will not know much genuine companionship. Once you touch the Lord, however, you will find out that there are so many good brothers and sisters in the

church, and you will appreciate these virgins. Before, although you had friends, there was no building up, and you were lonely. When you had only friends, you would get together when something you had in common interested you, but when the common interest disappeared, you went your separate ways. However, when you found the virgins, you found real fellowship. You discovered that there were so many following the Lord and loving the Lord beside you. You should not enjoy the wine of the Lord's love by yourself, but together with the other virgins.

**VIRGINS ARE THE REALITY
OF THE CHURCH**

These virgins are the reality of the church. No one can see the church apart from the experience of 1:3. People can talk about the church, but it will not be real without the virgins. The church is real to those who are attracted not only by the Lord but also by the brothers and sisters. The church is made up of those who fellowship not only with the Lord but also with the brothers and sisters. Such a person no longer lives an individual life, for he is pursuing the Lord with the saints. Such a person can testify, "Lord, the virgins love You."

A person who loves the Lord can never leave behind the five elements found in verses 2 and 3. First, such a person is always under the Lord's attraction. Second, such a person always seeks to know the love of the Lord. Third, the Lord's seeker seeks the Lord Himself as the processed One, as the anointing oil with a pleasant fragrance. Fourth, this person will always appreciate the Lord's work, as revealed in the Lord's name being an ointment poured forth. Fifth, the lover of the Lord will also always love the church and appreciate the saints. At this point, the church is manifested. No matter where you are in your growth in life, you have to repeatedly experience these five items at deeper and deeper levels.

“DRAW ME; WE WILL RUN AFTER YOU”

Verse 4 says, “Draw me; we will run after you.” This indicates that when the Lord draws you, everyone else will also follow Him. Brothers and sisters, when you are with the virgins, you must respect your influence on others’ going on. You are so crucial that when you live, everyone lives, and when you die, everyone dies.

A real lover of the Lord is bound to others. He knows that “draw me” will result in “we will run after you.” His experience before the Lord becomes the blessing of the saints, and the experience of the saints becomes his blessing. The seeker prays, “Please draw me. If You want us to follow You, You have to draw me, for if You draw me, we will all run after You.”

Brothers and sisters, the principle remains the same until the end of this book. In these eight chapters, it is always “me” and “we.” No one can experience these eight chapters alone. We need to experience all these things together with the other virgins. That is the principle of “Draw me; we will run after you.”

“THE KING”

Verse 4 says, “The king has brought me into his chambers—we will be glad and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you.” “The king,” “his chambers,” and “love” are mentioned here. The ruling in a person’s life changes when he knows Christ. Because of love, he now has a King in his heart. The King has authority over this person because of His love.

THE KING’S AUTHORITY IS FOUNDED ON LOVE

At first we were free to be self-centered. We walked where we wished. Then one day we began to love the Lord, and we consecrated ourselves to Him. From then on we began to fear God. No one can be taught to fear God, for the fear of God comes from one’s love for God. The more we love Him, the more we fear to hurt Him or do wrong to Him. The authority comes from love.

The person we love is our king. When we love the Lord absolutely, the Lord is our absolute King. The Lord's ability to rule in our life depends on how much love we have for Him. If we give ourselves to Him without any reservation, He will be our King completely.

Whatever you love is your king. If movies ravish someone's heart, movies are that person's king. If novels ravish a person's heart, that person gives novels the right to rule over him. If the Lord has ravished your heart, He is your King. The transition of authority from everything else to Christ comes not from "a sense of right or duty, but the sight of peerless worth" (*Hymns*, #437). If the love of the Lord touches you, you will tell Him, "Lord, You are my King."

In a good sense, to follow the Lord is easy. You don't need to gnash your teeth and consecrate yourself. You just need to touch His love. Then spontaneously you will say, "Oh, Lord, I have to have You as my King. My heart is all Yours." When you leave the Lord as your first love, you fall into the realm of "sense of duty." When the Lord's love is abundant in you, however, His abundant love will cause you to grow in life in the most natural way, and you will live a life taking Him as your King in everything.

"...HAS BROUGHT ME INTO HIS CHAMBERS"

Then the lover of the Lord says, "The king has brought me into his chambers" (v. 4). The king brought her into a place where she could fellowship with him and have a relationship beyond words.

ENJOYING THE SECRET FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE KING'S CHAMBERS

When you have this kind of fellowship with the Lord, you can't describe it to others except to Him. This is the experience of "the chambers." The more you have this experience, the more you are able to walk the way of the Lord. Each one who loves the Lord has his own experience of the King's chambers. Your experience in this regard is for no one else. In this place, the Lord reveals things

that are for you and Him alone. If you abide in this experience, in the inner chamber of your spirit, you will grow in your relationship with the Lord.

We will not grow if we are always busy in the outer court. We all must be in the chambers and have this special relationship with the Lord. Only such persons can really follow the Lord. Therefore, we shouldn't focus on our works so much. Instead, we should spend more time in the King's chambers.

The experience of these chambers is progressive. The more you have this experience, the more you are blessed. The chambers are the place where you touch the Lord and the Lord touches you, where you enjoy the Lord and the Lord enjoys you, and where you are with the Lord and the Lord is with you. This intimacy is beyond words. It is inexhaustible.

We should always have a secret love life with the Lord. We should have something between the Lord and ourselves that is just ours; it is not for anyone else. We should have experiences and fellowship with the Lord that we cannot open to others, for it is special between the Lord and us and not for us to reveal to others. The love between the Lord and us is not for us to show off or brag about.

There are not many who keep such secrets with the Lord. There could be three reasons for this. First, one may not have a close relationship with the Lord. Second, one may be intimate with the Lord but have no secret with Him. Third, one may have a secret but reveal it instead of keeping it.

As normal Christians, we should have a secret with the Lord. The love between us is beyond outward pursuit or manifestation. This secret is only between the Lord and us. The love we have and the words we tell Him are not for others to know. However, we are usually more interested in works than the Lord. May the Lord save us and bring us into His chambers more.

**“WE WILL BE GLAD AND REJOICE IN YOU;
WE WILL EXTOL YOUR LOVE MORE THAN WINE”**

When the king draws “me” (singular) into his chambers, the result is that “we” (plural) “will be glad and rejoice in you”; “we” (plural) “will extol your love more than wine” (v. 4). Because you had the experience, the others are glad and rejoice in the Lord. This indicates that your individual, hidden experience in the King’s chambers affects others. You are not alone, but attached to others. As a result of your experience of the chambers, you have an expression and manifestation that causes the other virgins to be glad and rejoice in the Lord.

A person with the experience of the Lord’s chambers doesn’t need to shout or talk too much; he will give others the feeling that he is like a bridegroom on his honeymoon. He will be joyful, buoyant, and full of life. This kind of person can bring others to the Lord and can even cause others to extol the love of the Lord. Who can help others to love the Lord? Those who are in the experience of the love of the Lord. If you are permeated in His love and are enjoying a sweet relationship with Him in your spirit, it is easy for you to help others to love the Lord. People that meet you will realize that the love of the Lord is better than wine. Your fresh enjoyment in love causes others to rediscover the love of the Lord. It is not your speaking so much that renders real help to others; it is your being in life. A person in life can really affect people. Because of you, others will say to the Lord, “We will be glad and rejoice in You; we will extol Your love more than wine.”

“RIGHTLY DO THEY LOVE YOU”

Finally, verse 4 says, “Rightly do they love you.” What identifies a virgin is that he loves the Lord rightly, meaning his love is without any other wish, expectation, or condition. A true virgin thus follows the Lord without any condition, serves without any condition, and lives unconditionally in fellowship with the Lord. To such a one, joy cannot replace the Lord Himself—even the Lord’s pres-

ence cannot replace the Lord Himself. Such a person is so obedient to love the Lord that he has no request for anything. Besides the Lord, he desires nothing else, and he loves nothing else.

If the saints in a church are interested in the Lord and the enjoyment of the Lord alone, it shows that they rightly love the Lord. Some people do not love the Lord rightly. There are many conditions in their love. When a church is short of virgins, there will be a lot of conditions before the saints will submit to Him or give themselves. We need a lot of people rightly loving the Lord. The more people there are loving the Lord in this way, the more life and freshness there will be in the church.

The building up of the church does not depend upon the workers but on the lovers of the Lord. When such lovers come together, the church can be built up. “Struggling” is not the way to be built up. If you feel you must fight to be the prince’s daughter, for instance, you may end up killing a lot of virgins who you feel are in competition with you.

God desires to gain a group of people who love Him rightly as virgins. Such virgins do not have any plan for themselves. If there are many virgins loving the Lord rightly, He will have a church rightly loving Him. Then it is very easy for this church to be built up. The question is, how many of us rightly love Him? How many love Him without any requests, reservations, or conditions? How many of us have such a pure love toward Him? We have so many workers and so few lovers in the church. We like to compare ourselves with others: “Which of us is more manifested? Who is the leading one?” It is a fallen situation when we become merely workers.

We are so used to work that we train people to work instead of to love the Lord. It seems that we can tolerate people being away from the presence of the Lord, but we cannot tolerate the collapse of our work. Our focus is on the work more than on the saints’ love relationship with the Lord. The Song of Songs reveals to us that anything besides loving the Lord is unnecessary. The real service comes out of our love to the Lord. May the Lord raise up more lovers in the church who are only interested in Him!

**THE NEED TODAY: VIRGINS RIGHTLY
LOVING THE LORD**

Brothers and sisters, I have a heavy burden. May God have mercy on us to open our eyes! May we see how the church needs virgins who rightly love the Lord! Such saints have no plan for their future and are not interested in any position in the church. They don't want anything for themselves; they just focus on the Lord. If He says, "Stop," they stop. If He says, "Go," they go. If He says, "Pay the price," they pay the price. If He says, "Leave all," they leave all. Because they rightly love the Lord, every other consideration and expectation is laid aside.

May the Lord anoint these words so that we can love Him rightly! May the Lord gain a group of people to love Him rightly in the churches today! Only then can the churches be built up.

CHAPTER 2

THE VINEYARD

“I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look at me, because I am black, because the sun has scorched me. My mother’s sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you pasture your flock? Where do you make it lie down at noon? For why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions? If you yourself do not know, you fairest among women, go forth on the footsteps of the flock, and pasture your young goats by the shepherds’ tents. I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with plaits of ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you plaits of gold with studs of silver.” (Song of Songs 1:5-11)

“I AM BLACK BUT LOVELY”

The Lord’s seeker in verse 5 of chapter 1 says, “I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.” After seeing the virgins, the seeker realized

that the daughters of Jerusalem were not only saved but also living in the church life. Then, after intimate fellowship with the Lord, she begins to know who the Lord is, who she herself is, and where the brothers and sisters are.

When she was first with the virgins, she only saw that others were black, but she didn't see that she was also black. Now, after the Lord has brought her into His chambers, she realizes that she herself is black. Originally, she didn't feel so much a sinner, but now she realizes that she is indeed a fallen sinner. Now she has the realization, "Lord, I am black. I can neither do anything nor function in the church life."

If you are one who never touches the Lord, you will feel that you are suitable to serve the Lord. When you see yourself in the Lord's light, however, you realize your blackness and condemn yourself. If you don't come to the Lord, you don't see your real condition. Because you serve, you think that your hands are not black, and because you follow the Lord, you think that your feet are not black. You may feel that some areas in your life harbor some blackness, but you do not feel that you yourself are that black.

When will we realize how black we really are? Only when the Lord shines upon us. When the Lord shines upon us in some certain aspect, we see that some part of ourselves is black. Therefore the Lord must shine upon us again and again until we realize that all that we previously regarded as acceptable and commendable is nothing but utter blackness. Even our love to the Lord comes out of a black heart.

When the Lord shines upon you, you realize that you are as black inwardly and outwardly as the tents of Kedar. However, the more you see your blackness, the more you also see your inward beauty in the Lord, and you realize, "I am black, but lovely." Your inner loveliness corresponds to how much you realize your blackness. The more you realize you are black, the more lovely you will be. What you consider to be weakness, failure, and ugliness is actually considered as loveliness by God. When you are exposed, you feel weak and vulnerable, but in such a weak and vulnerable state you become lovely, and you are appreciated by God.

On the one hand, you are like the tents of Kedar, black inwardly and outwardly, having nothing of beauty. On the other hand, you are like the curtains of Solomon; you are of fine linen. You are lovely inwardly because Christ's righteousness is your covering. On the one hand, you consider yourself to be so poor. On the other hand, when you see the salvation in Christ, you feel that you are so rich and beautiful. This situation is the result of being with the King in His chambers.

“DO NOT LOOK AT ME”

Verse 6 says, “Do not look at me.” When the Shulammitte becomes aware of her blackness, she does not want to be looked upon by others. When the Lord begins to attract us, for some reason it is easy for us to seek the attention of others. When someone is zealous for the Lord, he often desires to stand out and be appreciated by others. However, those who love the Lord and follow the Lord eventually shun others' attention.

After her fellowship in the king's chamber, the Shulammitte stood out among the daughters of Jerusalem. This happens in your experience when brothers and sisters begin to notice that something has changed and that you are different because of your time with the Lord. However, the seeker's feeling is, “Do not look at me.” The Shulammitte feels she is too ugly to be looked at. She could tell the others about the beauty of the Lord, and she could also tell them about her shamefulness before the Lord, but at this level she knows that she is fallen, black, and vulnerable, so she seeks to remain hidden.

In the King James Version this verse continues, “Because the sun hath looked upon me,” meaning that her shame was due to the Lord's exposing. The light of the Lord shines like the sun, and you feel tender and exposed after He has done His work. Such a person dares not to be proud. Everyone who lives in such fellowship with the Lord warns others not to take notice of him. When the Lord really looks upon you, you will no longer care about others' “amens.” You will only live before the Lord and feel responsible to the Lord.

**“THEY MADE ME KEEPER
OF THE VINEYARDS”**

In verse 6 the seeker reports, “My mother’s sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards.” As one who loves the Lord and has a burden to carry out something before the Lord, the seeker has her own vineyard. If you have an intimate relationship with the Lord, you surely will have your own “vineyard”—something that you feel God has committed to you.

But this verse indicates that when you rise up to take care of your vineyard, you will come into contact with your “mother’s sons.” Who are these “mother’s sons”? They are the leading brothers who stand for the Lord as the responsible ones in the church life. They take the responsibility in the church, so they are involved with whatever you feel you are committed with. They also arrange other things for you, since you are one who loves the Lord. The responsible brothers rely upon the brothers and sisters who know the Lord and have received something from Him to carry out their burden, so they are often strong with those who love the Lord.

When you have an intimate relationship with the Lord and the Lord shines upon you, you will find that you become burdened for the vineyard. At that point, the Lord looks upon you and makes you realize that you are black, and other brothers and sisters will look at you and think that you are not willing to cooperate or that you yourself don’t know where to function. If you did not have a special relationship with the Lord, you would have no controversy with these saints, and they would not notice you much. However, once you have a special relationship with the Lord, you find that you have no rest. When the seeker says, “My own vineyard I have not kept,” she indicates that in such a situation, she just doesn’t know how to carry out what the Lord has committed to her.

“WHERE DO YOU PASTURE YOUR FLOCK?”

Verse 7 says, “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you pasture your flock?” Here she has a prayer, “Lord, please tell me

where You feed the flock. The brothers have asked me to serve in some matter, but I don't feel right about it. I want to labor according to my burden, but the brothers don't agree. Oh, Lord, where do You feed the flock?"

On the one hand, she has her commission from the Lord. On the other hand, she is still focused upon her relationship with the Lord. Our vineyard represents what the Lord has committed to us. We will find that although we may labor much in tending our vineyard, our labor will not satisfy us and will not produce what God desires, for our labor will be something from ourselves, and not from God. Such a realization will cause us to pray such a prayer, asking the Lord to show us His work. If we do not have such a relationship with the Lord, we will not come to this point, for we will not have the sense that there is any problem as we attempt to carry out what concerns us in the Christian life. But if we truly love the Lord, we will ask, "Tell me, You whom my soul loves, where do You feed Your flock?"

"WHERE DO YOU MAKE IT LIE DOWN AT NOON?"

The seeker continues, "Where do you make it (the flock) lie down at noon?" Noon is the "full" time of a day, as Proverbs 4:18 states, "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the full day." "To lie down" certainly means to rest. Therefore this verse indicates that the seeker desires to enter into something further with the Lord, for she is not finding satisfaction in her attempt to serve Him. Now she is no longer focused on carrying out a work, but on the supply and the full rest in Christ.

She is hungry for the Lord's supply and is seeking how to gain the full satisfaction in Him. Before this, she was trying to carry out something before the Lord, and she was frustrated. She told the Lord, "Lord, they made me keeper of the vineyards, and they were angry with me. I could not go anywhere, so I came to You. You whom my soul loves, please tell me, where do You pasture Your flock? Where do You make it lie down at noon?"

If you truly love the Lord, it will not matter what your assigned work is. When the brothers have their own feelings and opinions about what you should be doing, and you also have yours, it will leave you feeling confused as to how to function, and you will appear to have a problem with authority. The real issue, however, is not what you should be doing, but whether you have the Lord as your supply and rest. Therefore there will be an inner cry to the Lord, “You whom my soul loves, please tell me, where do You pasture Your flock? Where do You make it lie down at noon? My problem is not figuring out how I should be laboring, but how to gain the supply. The solution to my problem is not determining which vineyard I should be laboring in, but where I can find the full rest. Where is the supply and the rest? That is what I really need to find out.”

**WANDERING ASTRAY BY THE
“FLOCKS OF YOUR COMPANIONS”**

This verse goes on to say, “For why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?” “Veiled” can also be translated “wandering astray.” Originally the church life was very satisfactory to this person, but now she doesn’t know where to put herself. She feels that whatever she does is wrong and there is no place for her. Her “mother’s sons” care about everyone else’s burden, but they ignore hers. This is why such a one ends up wandering beside the flocks of her companions.

Brothers and sisters, if you do not pursue the Lord you will never experience this. You will simply be a daughter of Jerusalem in the church life, going to meetings. Once you develop a relationship with the Lord, however, you find out that your companions in the Lord, who are His co-workers, have their exercise in the flock, which includes you. But how do you feel? If they ask you just to go along with something, you feel you can’t go along, for you are too special. On the other hand, you are unable to take care of anything of your own. Eventually all that is left for such a person to do is to wander alongside the flocks of her companions.

When we start to love the Lord, we all have this feeling, for we don't yet know what it is to cooperate with others and to fellowship in the Body. Our wandering alongside the flock is due to our being very subjective. We touch the love of the Lord subjectively, and we think we know how to follow the Lord. However, we still have a great lack. We have experienced the Lord's exposing, but we haven't yet experienced the working of the cross. Hence we feel, "Where is the right place for me? Where can I function?" Not until we experience the Spirit's breaking will we realize that others are experiencing exactly the same thing that we are experiencing, and that others feel the very same things that we do. Because we are so subjective, however, we do not see this; we only see our own situation. Therefore we are not able to cooperate with others or to receive the direction in the Body.

**WANDERING ASTRAY BUT STILL GAINING
NOURISHMENT AND REST FROM THE LORD**

Although she feels that she is wandering astray because of her perplexity in the church life, she doesn't lose sight of the most important principle. This principle is that we must focus on our relationship with the Lord more than we focus on our work, and we should care for nourishment and rest more than we care for work. The seeker is still regulated by her experience in verses 2 and 3. The Lord has attracted her and captured her by His beauty. Apart from Him, she realizes she cannot have nourishment or rest. Although her attitude about serving caused her to wander astray, she is still able to go on because of her desire for the Lord. If not for this, her Christian life could have been over at this point.

If we have a normal spiritual condition before God, we will not easily be occupied and trapped with work. Instead, we will spend our time seeking the Lord. If at this point we are caught by work, we will not be able to go on in our growth. Only when we fully focus on the Lord are we able to go on spiritually.

In the church life, we need to remember that we should never try to keep a person by placing him into service. Although it is

possible to keep a person in the church life by bringing him to serve in some area, this is not the best way to help him. In particular, if you seek to establish someone in the church life by giving him some kind of responsibility before he has really touched the Lord, you are actually placing a stumbling block in front of him.

There is a problem in asking someone who has begun to love the Lord to serve in the church life as an easy way to help him. For example, if a high school student is asked to serve in children's service, surely he will come to the Lord and pray seriously. Because he realizes he lacks experience, he will look to God to grant him ability. On the one hand, this service will probably strengthen his attachment to the church life. On the other hand, as he grows and gains some experience, this service will no longer satisfy him. At that point he may disappear from the church life.

When we are seeking to help people, we need to bring them to the Lord's presence, so that they can have a direct relationship with the Lord, rather than just to an outward work. We need to help people live before the Lord, for what matters is not our work but our relationship with the Lord. Although work can satisfy a certain need for a while, nothing can replace the Lord Himself.

Her prayer is very good here. Although she is wandering astray as one veiled beside the flocks of the companions of the Lord, not knowing what her portion is, she still is seeking the Lord with all her heart. We need to pray from time to time, "Please tell me, Lord, where is the fullest rest and the richest nourishment? I am not satisfied nor at rest. How can I enjoy You more? How can I know You more?"

**“GO FORTH ON THE FOOTSTEPS
OF THE FLOCK”**

While she is struggling in this way, the Lord has mercy upon her. She knows that her nourishment and her hope can only be found in the Lord Himself. She realizes that the nourishing of life and rest come from Him alone. Therefore, no matter how difficult or uncertain things are outwardly, she still is able to go on by relying on the Lord.

Then the Lord answers her prayer, saying, “If you yourself do not know, you fairest among women, go forth on the footsteps of the flock, and pasture your young goats by the shepherds’ tents” (1:8). The Lord takes care of her according to her concern in her condition.

Every time we come to the Lord in this way, He seems encouraged and moved by our predicament and sees us as “fairest among women.” The Lord knows where we are, and He understands our complaint. (“But my own vineyard I have not kept. I don’t know where to pasture my young goats.”) He knows that our not knowing what to do is because of our love for Him. He also knows that outwardly we are weak and self-centered, but inwardly we are still lovely. Therefore He says, “You fairest among women, everything is fine. If you do not know, go forth along the footsteps of the flock.” The Lord doesn’t mention work in His response. When we love the Lord, we are easily occupied with work, and we want to do something for Him. His desire, however, is to save those who love Him from work.

“The footsteps of the flock” is plural in number, signifying the spiritual walk of all the believers. From the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost throughout all church history, the real followers of the Lord have demonstrated their love in the midst of persecution, sacrifice, and even martyrdom. Many are still following this way to love the Lord today. We need to trace these steps and continue along this way that the saints before have trod.

The principles of spiritual growth will never change. Just as the Lord helped Peter, James, John, Paul, and many other saints to grow in life at that time, so will the Lord lead you today. If you are wandering alongside the flocks of your companions feeling depressed, it is good to read some biographies of those who loved the Lord before. The story of their experiences with the Lord will supply you and help you through your difficulties.

We need to realize that nourishment and rest can be found not only through our pursuit of the Lord directly, but also from the spiritual experiences of other brothers and sisters. Today the flock has gone quite a distance, leaving many footsteps for us to follow. What

we need to do is to go forth in these footsteps of the flock.

It is wrong to think that today we are the end-all of the Lord's recovery and that what the saints did before is of little importance. We may be laboring at a different stage in the Lord's work, but the principles of life have not changed. To follow the Lord, we need to be able to learn from the life experiences of those who are ahead of us and who have gone ahead of us. Unless we are unfaithful, we will end up confronting what other saints have confronted before. Thus, we have to receive what others have learned. The Lord wants to save us from work into life. As He has shepherded his lovers in the past, in the same manner He will shepherd us.

When we begin following the Lord, somehow we mix other things in with our loving the Lord, and we easily go astray. Even our pursuing can become mixed up with some kind of work. Therefore we must go forth on the footsteps of the flock, which is the way of life. In our following of the Lord we will not end up in a situation that no one has ever experienced before. Often we can experience a breakthrough by receiving the riches from those who have passed on in this way before us.

**“PASTURE YOUR YOUNG GOATS
BY THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS”**

The Lord continues, “And pasture your young goats by the shepherds' tents.” “Shepherds” is plural in number. If it were singular, it could refer to the Lord, but this is not the case in this verse. The shepherds in verse 8 actually refer to the frustrating “my mother's sons” in verse 6. You may be unable to obey “my mother's sons” and may argue with them because they are just slightly ahead of you in the church life and are not qualified to give you directions. You may also question why they don't let you function according to your burden.

The Lord's answer is very particular—He tells her to live under the authority in the church. If the Lord is the great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4), the brothers are also the shepherds to whom the Lord has given responsibility (1 Pet. 5:2). If the Lord

builds up the church (Matt. 16:18), so also do the brothers (Eph. 4:16). You cannot look down upon them, thinking that they are just “other children of my mother.” Don’t place them on the same level with yourself. You have to see that they are the shepherds appointed by the Lord. When you say, “O daughters of Jerusalem,” you are joyful to be among them. But when you say, “My mother’s sons were angry with me,” you are complaining about the Lord’s arrangement. The Lord seems to be saying, “Don’t think that you can be independent and do your own thing just because you have your particular burden, commission, and vineyard. You still need to pasture your young goats by the shepherds’ tents. You cannot carry out something independently from the brothers.”

We have to learn that every shepherd has his tent. The Lord allows us to work, but He does not allow us to work individually and separately. To work properly for God, we need to unite under the shepherds’ tents. We cannot try to carry out our burden independently according to our own way and opinion. We have to learn to bring our burden to the brothers, bringing to the church what the Lord has committed to us. Then we will really be able to take care of others. We should pasture our young goats by the shepherds’ tents.

Those who begin to follow the Lord should personally pursue the growth of life on one hand, and they should know the footsteps of the flock on the other. The footsteps of the flock grant us confidence that our labor is of the Lord. The Lord did not call us to follow Him on our own. The Lord will not ask us to leave the rich supply in the church. Even when we have some young “goats” to take care of, we need to pasture them by the shepherds’ tents.

I worship the Lord very much when I come to this section. Before we touch the Lord, we can say amen to just about anything in the church life. But as we touch the Lord and begin to pursue Him, we begin to feel burdened about some particular matter in the church life, and then we wander astray. At such a time, we may treat the more experienced brothers diminutively as being merely our “mother’s sons.” But we thank the Lord that rather than rebuking us for being proud and selfish, He gently readjusts us, say-

ing, “You fairest among women, if you don’t know, go forth on the footsteps of the flock, and pasture your young goats by the shepherds’ tents.”

Therefore, if we truly love the Lord, we will treasure the experiences of those who have loved Christ before us. We may love the Lord and yet say, “What relevance do Madame Guyon and John Wesley have for us today? They are out of fashion as far as the Lord’s move is concerned.” If this is our feeling, we may end up missing the footsteps of the flock.

If we love the Lord and wish to follow Him in life, we must receive the learning experiences left for us by those who have gone before. If we truly love the Lord, we cannot separate ourselves from the shepherds. We should recognize those whom the Lord has placed among us as shepherds. Then, we just pasture our young goats by the shepherds’ tents.

**“A MARE” AND “PLAITS OF ORNAMENTS”—
OUR NATURAL SWIFTNESS AND BEAUTY**

The Lord says, “I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots” (1:9). The Lord compares His lover to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots. As for her ability, she is swift. As for her appearance, she is strong. But as for her personality, she is wild. She is lacking in both the humanity and divinity of the Lord, so she is rough and wild in her pursuing.

Verse 10 says, “Your cheeks are lovely with plaits of ornaments.” The beauty of our face is partially determined by our cheeks. But hair properly arranged can help our cheeks look good. Verse 10 says that our beauty is due to our ornamentation. Some women know how to make their hair beautiful so as to get more male attention. The one who loves the Lord, on the one hand, doesn’t want to be looked at, because she realizes she is black. On the other hand, she knows how to make herself beautiful so that her loveliness might be noticed.

What does the phrase, “Your cheeks are lovely with plaits of ornaments,” refer to? It is common for a person who is just begin-

ning to love the Lord to act as if he were more spiritual than he really is for the sake of others' eyes. This is to try to enhance one's loveliness with plaits of ornaments. Actually, the experienced saints will quickly perceive when a person is just "making plaits" and realize that the behavior is not from the Spirit. As a matter of fact, we are all good at making plaits. We know if we proclaim something a certain way we will look strong, or if we do something in a certain way we will look spiritual.

Therefore, saints at this stage spend much time "plaiting their hair" instead of pursuing the Lord. They try to exercise their will and emotion to be what they perceive as being spiritual. As for how God will transform them and how they will look when they are really matured, we cannot yet see because their beauty is only self-made.

**"YOUR NECK IS LOVELY WITH STRINGS
OF JEWELS"—OUR NATURAL OBEDIENCE**

In verse 10 the Lord continues by saying, "Your neck is lovely with strings of jewels." "Neck" represents our ability to obey. In the Old Testament, God often said that the Israelites were a stiff-necked people. No one who is just beginning to love the Lord feels that he needs to obey. Instead, when we are just beginning to love the Lord, we have opinions inwardly while outwardly we put on a string of jewels, making our necks appear beautiful, and seem to be subservient. As a matter of fact our submission is not real, and if we were asked to obey, we could not. We still lack the capacity to understand the price our obedience would require.

During a prevailing conference, hundreds of saints may declare their consecration to the Lord. For the most part, these declarations are just a string of jewels. Until the day our consecration is tested by the Lord, we won't realize how hard our neck is. The seeker here appears to love the Lord, and thinks she loves the Lord, but that is not truly the case. Her appearing tender and submissive before others is just an outward string of jewels and is not out of the constitution of life. Before men, she makes plaits in her

hair, and before God, she wears a string of jewels. No matter how her hair is plaited, however, or what she does to string jewels around her neck, God can perceive that she is yet a wild mare.

“WE WILL MAKE YOU PLAITS OF GOLD”

In verse 11 the Lord says, “We will make you plaits of gold with studs of silver.” She had asked the Lord, “Where do You pasture Your flock? Where do You make it lie down at noon?” The Lord’s answer indicates that what she needs in her present condition is not nourishment or rest, but the work of the cross.

The Triune God will make you plaits of gold with studs of silver. “Plaits of gold” in the original language means something that resembles a crown. It is a ringlet, a crown with golden borders. This means you must let God work His disposition and nature into you. The result of God’s work in you becomes a little crown. Sometimes you feel that the cross is too heavy to bear and that you are treading the wilderness on barren, thirsty ground. However, after every suffering, a little more of the crown is developed in you. Besides the Lord, others around you can also see this crown, which indicates that you have grown during this period in your life.

In fact, we often make plaits using the gift God has given us, so that others would notice our capability to carry out spiritual work or to minister in the church. Such service is superficial. But although we make others think that we are very gifted, this does not bother God. He simply brings us to the cross so that what is really of Him might be worked into us.

It is not wrong to be gifted, and we can’t say that our gift is not needed. When He sees her plaits of ornaments, the Lord doesn’t ask the Shulammitte to cut off all of her hair. What God desires is to develop our gift into something genuine, something of ministry, by working Himself into our ability. What God regards is whether or not our gift has been constituted with a crown.

The Triune God wants to work in us. Since we like ornaments and we like to be well known, God will make us plaits of gold. We made up our own hair before, but now God comes to “weave” His

disposition into us. Our spirituality and beauty were merely human, but now God comes to constitute His own beauty into us, enabling us to express His divinity. Then we will not merely be a lover of the Lord, but also someone who loves the Lord in union with Him.

The cross works on you with little sympathy, regardless of your willingness. When God says, “We will make you plaits of gold,” He surely will do it. The process of making you plaits of gold is a fine work. He will completely divide your hair, and He will exhaust you to the extent that you feel there is no way to go on. Eventually, however, when God knits your hair together, you will find that something has been added to you.

God doesn’t work while you are sleeping; after waking up you don’t find a gold crown woven into your hair. You will surely feel it when the Lord works on you. The work of the cross is what produces your crown, and the more you possess this crown, the more you will be able to truly help others and genuinely serve. Making your own hair beautiful could not stand up to any kind of challenge in the environment. The younger ones whom you serve will also make their own plaits. When Satan comes to attack, their plaits will just fall down. Unless you have something divine in your constitution, woven as a crown through the work of the cross, you will not be able to help such ones.

God allows Satan to test every work of His. God allows Satan to attack those whom He has worked on. If your hair isn’t made with gold, then Satan will not seem to notice you. But just when you are willing to go on with the Lord a little, Satan will come to God to accuse you, and suddenly many things will happen. Do not be discouraged. Your experience through such difficult times will produce in you a golden crown.

Every time you reach a new peak in your spiritual growth, you need to be prepared for Satan’s renewed attack, and you need to ask for the Lord’s preservation. However, be assured that God will only allow Satan to attack you and test you according to your capacity. Those who lead, those who love the Lord more absolutely, and those who are more committed to the Lord will go through more sufferings. The result of such sufferings, however, is the woven

crown of gold.

In the midst of this process you will often feel unclear, blocked, frustrated, or even dead. But at such a time the Spirit will constitute you, and the Triune God will work on you, bringing out a further expression of the gold. The more constitution you have, the more of a golden plaited crown you will gain. When you see some saints in the church, you just feel they are shining and glorious and that there are many crowns upon them. This is the result of God's special work with them through the cross, by which He has made them plaits of gold.

“STUDS OF SILVER”

God will also make you plaits with studs of silver (v. 11). Silver signifies redemption, and studs of silver again refer to the work of the cross. If you wish to follow the Lord and live before Him, He will make you studs of silver. In other words, He will let the cross work on you. God wants to separate His “mare among Pharaoh's chariots” from the world by making her studs of silver. God wants you to pass through the experience of His redemption and gain redemption through grace. Presently you may be attached to the world due to your weakness. He will save you gradually until you are completely separated from the world. Thus the Lord will both constitute His life into you for His divine, golden expression and also work on you by the cross in order that you might experience His redemption. In this way, He will eventually make you His beloved bride who is able to really match Him.

Our experience will always be along these two lines: the line of nourishing and the line of the work of the cross. As we experience these two lines, God will be able to constitute us with Himself. We thank the Lord that He does not shame us or reject us for being a wild mare. May the Lord work in us so that we will have more hunger for His nourishing and for gaining His rest. Meanwhile, may we let the cross do its work to make us plaits of gold with studs of silver so that we can live before Him in an increasing union with Him.

CHAPTER THREE

A LILY OF THE VALLEYS

“While the king was at his table, my spike-nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh that lies at night between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of En-gedi. Oh, you are beautiful, my love! Oh, you are beautiful! Your eyes are like doves. Oh, you are beautiful, my beloved; indeed, pleasant! Indeed, our couch is green. The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are cypresses. I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” (Song of Songs 1:12—2:1)

“WHILE THE KING WAS AT HIS TABLE”

In verse 12 of chapter 1 the Shulammitte says, “While the king was at his table, my spikenard gave forth its fragrance.” This loving seeker makes mention of the king twice in this first stage of her experience. The first time she mentioned him was in verse 4, where the king brought her into his chambers. She took the Lord as her king because He brought her into inner rest and satisfaction. In such an atmosphere she enjoyed His love. The second time she mentions the king is here in verse 12, where she tells us the king is at his table. The seeking one has now experienced some work of the cross. The Lord has made her plaits of gold with studs of silver.

She knows that God desires to work in her so that she can appreciate Christ's riches in others. Now she is under His authority and no longer in the stage of being self-centered in her seeking.

The seeker has had some growth between these two mentions of the king. This time she doesn't say that she is at the table with the king. She doesn't say, "*I* was at the king's table," or, "The king brought *me* to his table." Praise the Lord for this precious transition! She has experienced a transfer from being focused on herself in her seeking to being focused on the Lord Himself.

Brothers and sisters, how do you come to the point where you can say, "The king is at his table?" How do you know you have experienced the transfer from self-rule to the rule of the King? According to verses 7-11, there are four principles you must apply. First, you need to go forth "on the footsteps of the flock." Second, you must "pasture your young goats by the shepherds' tents." Third, you need to let God make you "plaits of gold." And fourth, you need to let God make you "plaits... with studs of silver." These four principles determine whether you are one who can experience what is represented by the phrase, "The king is at his table."

At this stage, when the brothers render you some help, you will feel that it is the Lord who gains the satisfaction rather than you. It is not you who gain the enjoyment, but the Lord. You will yield more to the Lord, and He will be able to work in you more freely. Brothers and sisters, this is special. When you go forth on the footsteps of the flock, you become different. When you live by the shepherds' tents, you are changed. When the cross works in you and the redemption of Christ is accomplished in you, a transition takes place. The king begins to rule in your heart, and you become the king's enjoyment.

"MY SPIKENARD GAVE FORTH ITS FRAGRANCE"

What does the king enjoy while he is at his table? The enjoyment is Christ and the food is also Christ. Only Christ can satisfy God. On one hand, it seems we are not important when we recognize that the king is at his table. However, we are not told what

food was set upon the king's table. Rather, we are told that while he was at the table, "My spikenard gave forth its fragrance." What Christ has accomplished is not the center here. Instead, we are the center of Christ's work before God. Although it is the Lord who is at the table, we are there too as the result of His work. This phrase, "My spikenard gave forth its fragrance," should fill us with joy. Earlier the Shulammite said, "Your name is like ointment." Now she says, "While the king was at his table, my spikenard gave forth its fragrance." What a wonderful experience this is!

The phrase "your name is like ointment," indicates that our Lord is not only rich but also processed; He became a man, suffered, shed blood, was crucified, passed through death, and was resurrected. He went to the cross and died for us. His work gives forth a fragrance, so that we can say, "Your name is like ointment." Now, however, the Shulammite can say, *my* spikenard gave forth its fragrance for the king's satisfaction.

GIVING FORTH A FRAGRANCE BY BEING BROKEN

We thank the Lord that He works in us and breaks us. We are no longer what we were before. We are no longer those who were merely zealous for the Lord and who just wanted to have the Lord for our own enjoyment. Now we have a little "scar" from His work upon us. The Lord has worked a little and changed us. We give forth a fragrance from this scar, and our being is changed. What the Lord appreciates is this fragrance. It is not enough just to give something to the Lord and labor for Him. We also need to be dealt with by the Lord. Only as we are broken can this wonderful life flow out from us. Only then can our spikenard give forth its fragrance. This fragrance satisfies not only the saints but also the King who is at His table.

However, we need to remember that it was the believer and not the Lord who said this. A person who is just beginning to learn the lessons of the cross has only been dealt with by the Lord to a certain extent. Although her spikenard gives forth its fragrance, it is not yet the full fragrance. Furthermore, although the king is the

object of the fragrance, the Shulammitte hasn't yet forgotten about herself. She is not yet lost in the Lord.

“MY BELOVED TO ME IS A BUNDLE OF MYRRH”

In verse 13 the seeker says, “My beloved to me is a bundle of myrrh that lies at night between my breasts.” If you have experienced something of the dealings and breaking work of the cross, you will consider it very precious. When you touch the cross the Lord has measured to you, your ointment of spikenard will spontaneously flow out. When the cross works on you, you will be changed. You will belong to heaven more. At that time you can grant God some satisfaction, for you are more willing to allow the cross to do its work, and your person is more for the Lord. At such a time you can testify, “My beloved is a bundle of myrrh that lies at night between my breasts.”

Myrrh symbolizes death. Verse 13 reveals that the seeker considers the working of the Lord's death something to be treasured. Prior to this, she treasured the Lord's love beyond all else. (“For your love is better than wine. We will extol your love more than wine.”) Here, however, her beloved has become to her a bundle of myrrh. She has come to realize the meaning of the Lord's death.

At first, our experience of the Lord is primarily something of love. We were drawn by the Lord's love and His loveliness. We saw that the Lord was worthy of our pursuit. Gradually, we discovered that the death of the Lord is the realization of His love in us. Apart from realizing the death of the Lord, we cannot know the meaning of His love. How can we experience His love? It is by our dying together with Him. The more we die, the more we experience His love and the more deeply we experience the riches of His love. When we are put into His death, we are put into His love. If we are constantly living in the death of the Lord, we are constantly living in His love.

“...THAT LIES AT NIGHT BETWEEN MY BREASTS”

“At night” in this verse indicates the period of time before dawn. In other words, the Lord hasn’t come yet. Before the Lord comes, it is still night, and during this long night, I am willing to take this myrrh as the center of my life. Therefore, the death of the Lord is “between my breasts.”

Brother Watchman Nee explained the breasts as representing faith and love (see 1 Thes. 5:8). Actually, we can also say the breasts represent the manifestation of maturity of life. In the process of our growth of life, we progress with faith and love through our experience of the Lord’s death. The preciousness of the growth of life is with this death. If I experience this myrrh, I will grow in life and I will become more mature in life. When I experience myrrh, I am able to stand more solidly before God. Therefore the seeking one testifies, “Lord, I need Your death. I do not pray for greater power; deeper death is what I need.”

When we follow the Lord, we need to value what He values and love what He loves. Only when we follow Him seriously will we be able to continue to follow Him through the various environments He measures to us. A person who does not know the cross does not yet know what it means to love the Lord. When he touches something, he may shout, “Now I see it! Hallelujah, amen!” but afterwards, he will still live his life his own way. A person who really follows the Lord realizes the meaning of “night” and has only one desire, that is, that the morning would dawn.

Most people prefer the day above the night. One problem we have is that we simply do not feel we are in the time of night. We think instead that we still have many hours of daylight left, and therefore things don’t bother us; we feel very confident and capable and therefore do not feel we need the Lord’s presence. Few of us have the feeling that we are in the time of night.

Only those who realize that they are in the night need the Lord’s death, represented by the myrrh. If you don’t feel you are in the night, death does not have much opportunity to operate in you, so there will be little of the deeper working of the cross. A person who

truly follows the Lord only desires the Lord's return. He lives only for the Lord. Since he realizes he is living in the night, earthly ties do not entangle him.

When Watchman Nee was 22 years old, he wrote hymn #468 (in the Chinese hymnal, not yet translated into English). In it he expresses his desire that his living and work would be able to pass through the fire and the Lord's examination before His judgment seat. Every day he felt that his living was for the Lord and His coming. He hoped what he had done in this life could stand the test before the Lord on that day. Because of this desire and this attitude, his Beloved was to him a bundle of myrrh at night between his breasts.

**“A CLUSTER OF HENNA FLOWERS
IN THE VINEYARDS OF EN-GEDI”**

The Lord's seeker continues, “My beloved is to me a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of En-gedi.” Henna flowers are not overly conspicuous, but among the green leaves of a vineyard they are able to stand out. “My beloved is to me a cluster of henna flowers” can be interpreted to mean, “I treasure my Lord in my heart, and He is so beautiful to me.”

En-gedi is a place in the wilderness to which David fled to find shelter from Saul. According to Watchman Nee, “En-gedi” means “the fountain of the lamb.” When we are waiting for the Lord and experiencing His death, on the one hand, He is our shelter, and on the other hand, He is our fountain of life in the wilderness. How should we live upon this earth today? Our living should be completely in the Lord. On the one hand, He is our fountain and life supply—He quenches our thirst and takes care of our needs. On the other hand, the Lord is our shelter—we can trust in Him in any situation. When there is a difficult environment, we can hide ourselves in Him. What matters is not our strength, but that we can hide in Him and experience Him as our fountain, as our life supply.

“OH, YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, MY LOVE!”

In verse 15 the king exclaims, “Oh, you are beautiful, my love! Oh, you are beautiful!” The king told the Shulammitte earlier that she was the fairest among women (v. 8), meaning that she was special and manifested even among the other saved ones. However, this time the king’s word is, “Oh, you are beautiful, my love!” She gives forth the fragrance of spikenard, and she has experienced His death. She enjoys the Lord as her life supply and hides herself in Him. These things draw forth the Lord’s appreciation.

We are usually very shallow. When there is a cross for us, our feeling is that the Lord is beating us for something wrong we have done. I think, “He is disciplining me because I am bad. The Lord is breaking me because I am terrible. It is all due to my being such a difficult person.” However, the Lord says, “You are beautiful! Oh, you are beautiful!” We think that we are too terrible to match the Lord. But the Lord says, “Do not focus on your weakness. I do not pay attention to your weakness, failure, and uncleanness. When you enjoy Me as your fountain of life and hide in Me, you are beautiful.”

Brothers and sisters, what a precious praise this is! This verse is for all those whose Beloved is to them a bundle of myrrh. It is not only for the saints who are faithful as those in the night, but also for those who realize the beauty of the henna flower and live in the vineyards of En-gedi. In particular, it is for those who consider themselves so weak that they only can rely on the Lord’s death and desire that the Lord would work in them more deeply.

Few of us can elicit this particular praise from the Lord. We usually think that our experience of the Lord’s life is somehow adequate. But I want to ask, how much do we really give the Lord? How much desire do we really have for the Lord? Or do we just focus on work or on what others think of us? We need to remember that no matter how much we labor or how zealous we are, we still need to remain in En-gedi. No matter how busy we are, we still have to live in the “night.” Then the Lord will say that we are beautiful. May the Lord enlighten us and reveal His intent and pleasure to us.

“YOUR EYES ARE LIKE DOVES”

Then the Lord tells the Shulammitte, “Your eyes are like doves.” At this point, the characteristic of this pursuing one is that her eyes are like doves. This refers to both her spiritual insight and her purity. A person with eyes like doves is pure—he only sees the Lord. A pure person has spiritual insight, and a person with spiritual insight finds it easier to be pure.

The first thing the Lord mentions in His praise of His seeker is that her eyes are like doves. She has passed through a number of situations. She pastured young goats, so she was very busy. However, her eyes could only see the Lord. She could not see the Lord and her work at the same time. She simply followed the Lord according to her spiritual sight, rather than the outward situation.

If you truly follow the Lord, if you really walk in life, the Lord will ask you, “Do you have spiritual sight?” The first characteristic evident in a healthy Christian is that he has eyes like doves. Spiritual insight is the foundation of our following and serving the Lord. Without spiritual insight, we cannot serve the Lord in a healthy way. The better your spiritual sight is, the more you will have a healthy pursuing, and you will also be more able to lead the saints properly.

If you are spiritually “nearsighted,” God will not be able to speak clearly to you, nor can He appear to you. For example, when Eli was old, his eyes were dim, so there was no vision of the Lord through his service (1 Sam. 3:1). If you are not willing to pay the price for the Lord, you will not have spiritual insight. Once you make your own plans, consider your own benefit, or want to gain something for yourself, you lose your spiritual insight. This is a principle. If you serve without spiritual insight, it means you consider what is in your own best interest.

We do not become pure immediately after believing in the Lord. This is why we can see religion and politics being practiced even among us in the church. How can we be preserved from impurity? The Lord says, “Only when your eyes are like doves can you be pure. Only when you have spiritual insight can you stand before Me.”

A person with spiritual insight knows how to serve properly, for he makes his decisions with the Lord alone in view. Without spiritual insight, we can only make decisions according to the outward situation and some principles. Some people like exciting meetings. When you possess spiritual insight, however, you realize that many so-called good meetings aren't really so good from God's perspective. We need to ask ourselves what we are doing. It doesn't matter how exciting a meeting is. What is important is how much a meeting supplies the church.

We will be in another realm if we have spiritual insight. We will touch the source of life and not just the outward situation. If we only see the Lord, we will not hold on to any spiritual thing and we will not try to be spiritual. We will, however, be living spiritually. When we are pure for the Lord, we will have spiritual discernment. If we are pure and have spiritual discernment, the Lord will proclaim us as beautiful. Although our beauty and purity are not complete, and although we have weakness and need to be broken, we can still have eyes like doves. Having eyes like doves is the way for us to follow the Lord.

“INDEED, OUR COUCH IS GREEN”

Verse 16 says, “Indeed, our couch is green.” “Green” in this verse could also be translated “of grass.” Our couch being green emphasizes the growth in life.

In verse 13 the Shulammitte had an experience of consecration, saying, “My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh that lies at night between my breasts.” It seems that she had paid a price. When the Lord praised His seeker's beauty, she realized that she was good and sweet before the Lord, and she knew that He was full of supply. There was so much supply, sweetness, and abundance of enjoyment in life that she now says, “Our couch is green.” She is restful and full of life. Such a person rests on the Lord's faithfulness and experiences the comfort of His rod and staff, resting in His rich supply. Psalm 23:2 says, “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” This indicates that life provides the foundation for our

lying down. Why do we have rest? Because we have experienced the life of the Lord. Why can we rest? Because the Lord supplies us with His life. We have a life relationship with the Lord, so we can testify, “Our couch is green.”

Brothers and sisters, I am afraid that for many of us, our bed is rarely green. If we love the Lord and truly consecrate ourselves to the Lord we will say, “Lord, thank You that my couch is green.” Although I have followed the Lord for several years, I never feel that my labor and service are sufficient. I never have the feeling I have accomplished much. My feeling is, “Lord, after so many years, why do I still feel like I am just beginning to love You?” It seems that after many years, there is still so much for me to experience. We can’t rest just because we have accomplished some laboring, preaching, or learning. There will always be so much more for us to experience. We should always be able to say, “Our couch is green.” That means we are full of life.

“THE BEAMS OF OUR HOUSE ARE CEDARS”

Verse 17 states, “The beams of our house are cedars.” “Cedar” refers to the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus. In Solomon’s temple, there were two chief kinds of wood—cedar and cypress. The expression of the church is through these two kinds of wood. At this time the Lord’s seeker realizes, “I live not only for the Lord, but also for the saints. I not only want to walk with the Lord in the wilderness, I also want to be built up in the church.” How can we build up the church? The most important element is not ourselves, although the building cannot take place without us. The church is built up by means of myrrh (the Lord’s death) and cedar (the glorious humanity of Jesus expressed in us).

Angels do not build the church. The church is built up with the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. Speaking in tongues can’t build up the church. Only those with some constitution of the Lord’s humanity can build up the church. Hallelujah that the cedars are the beams of our house! When we are built up together, there is an expression of the Lord’s glorious humanity.

“OUR RAFTERS ARE CYPRESSES”

Next we are told, “Our rafters are cypresses.” When we look at a house, we see its rafters first, not its beams. What does cypress represent in the Bible? Cypress trees were planted beside graves. Cypress wood indicates that there is also death being expressed in us, the death produced through the work of the cross in us. If you are willing to let the cross work in you, you will express death. Although the cross puts you to death, you become a person who really functions, for your death helps manifest your function in the building.

Brothers and sisters, there are three things needed for the building up of the church. First, our couch must be green—we must be full of life. Without life, there is no building up of the church, for life is the content of the church. In a healthy church we should be able to enjoy an abundance of life. Second, our beams must be of cedar—the humanity of the Lord Jesus must be constituted into us. We not only have a life relationship with the Lord, but we also have His humanity. Third, our rafters must be of cypress—we must experience the work of the cross. Only through the death of the cross can we be united and built together. These three matters speak of the seeker’s growth at the end of the first stage of her pursuing.

“I AM A ROSE OF SHARON, A LILY OF THE VALLEYS”

After the seeker sees the church and experiences the riches in life, she testifies, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys” (2:1). The rose here could be considered as a kind of wild lily, which is actually a scorned flower. A lily in the valleys is also ordinary and unassuming. Sharon represents the plain where God pastures His flock. The Lord has become equally precious to her whether she is at ease or in suffering, for the Lord is just as precious to her when she is in the pasture as when she is in the valleys. When she is at ease, she is a rose of Sharon. When she is suffering, she is a lily of the valleys. No matter whether she is at ease or in suffering, she knows that God is shepherding her and caring for her.

The Lord's seeker now realizes that she is nothing special or extraordinary. She no longer exalts or glorifies herself or considers herself to be the most useful one. She no longer thinks she is the one who loves the Lord the most. Instead, she feels that she is just an ordinary flower, and she even likens herself to a despised flower. There is nothing to brag about. There is nothing to be manifested. She is a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys, and God is caring for her.

Without experiencing Christ as life, we have no way to realize what we are or who the Lord is, and neither do we understand what a man is. When you really touch the Lord, you will realize the meaning of this verse. When you live according to the divine life and when you experience the work of the cross, you will experience the reality of being a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys. At that time you will have a realization of who you are and what man is. You will also begin to know the Lord.

Every young saved one feels he is most hopeful and expects to be someone special. Every saint hopes he will have a certain manifestation in the church life. No one is willing to be ordinary. If the brother who helped you to love the Lord told you, "You will be hopeless," it is doubtful you would still have any desire to pursue the Lord. If you were to think, "Why should I pay the price to love the Lord since I will be hopeless?" that would mean your focus is on yourself instead of the Lord. Thinking in this way indicates that you are living in a religious world. Once you realize that you are a rose of Sharon, you will know that you are not special in the church life. Among those who follow the Lord, you will become an unassuming person.

What God cares for is a rose of Sharon, not an orchid in a pot. Do you know the difference? If you are like an orchid in a pot, although you have some equipping, you still need to be tended by some other saints or you will wither. The rose of Sharon, however, needs no special attention by others. You also have to realize that there is no strife among the roses of Sharon. It is wrong to consider yourself as someone with higher revelation or with more special equipping. We need to be able to realize before the Lord, "Lord,

I am nobody special in the church life. I am just like others.” Today the Lord needs to gain many roses of Sharon. He doesn’t need expensive, showy orchids. The building up of the church is through the ordinary ones, not the showy ones.

We are often not willing to be just roses of Sharon. Brothers and sisters, we live in God’s mercy. We pursue because God’s love attracts us. It is the Lord who brings us into His chambers. It is the Lord who reveals His cross to us. It is the Lord who works in us and who supplies us with His life. Besides these things, what can we boast in? We are nothing but a rose of Sharon.

When the Lord works in us, we will realize that we are very ordinary. We should have a feeling that it is completely due to His mercy that we receive any portion in His work. Only because of this do we have a part in His ministry, and only because of this are we able to render others some help. Meanwhile, we are also lilies of the valleys. We should learn to look to the Lord. We should realize that it is the Lord who cares for us. It is the Lord who is responsible for us. It is the Lord who revives His church. Every one of us needs to see that on the one hand, we are each a rose of Sharon—we are very ordinary. On the other hand, we are each a lily of the valleys—we trust in God’s care. Although we may have the experience of being in the valleys, we can be assured that God cares for His lilies.

Brothers and sisters, do you know who your Lord is? He is the Lord of the lilies. You are a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys. Although you are nobody, God cares for you. Although you are nobody, God is responsible for you and wants to accomplish His work through you. God will hold you until you fully realize that you are a lily of the valleys.

We should keep this verse in our heart: “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” We may not be able to see what the future holds or how we will be able to go on. But we should have this attitude—God’s mercy and care will never fail us. We should have a realization that we are lilies of the valleys. We should fear nothing. No matter where the Lord leads us, no matter what kind of situation we find ourselves in, we should thank the Lord. Whether

it is difficult or easy, whether we like it or not, we should be thankful. We are lilies of the valleys. We live in the valleys and not in the pots. It is the Lord who cares for us and preserves us.

If we realize this, we will not become a problem in the church life. Instead, we will be able to function properly in all kinds of situations. We will simply feel, “Lord, thank You for Your leading. We are just lilies under Your care. Men don’t take care of us, nor does a work care for us. It is You Yourself who take care of each one of us. And even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for You are with us.”

What a deep and precious experience is found within this short chapter! The Lord’s seeker has experienced a great change here. Praise the Lord for this beautiful picture of our union with the Lord!

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BANQUETING HOUSE

“As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons: In his shade I delighted and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the fields, not to rouse up or awaken my love until she pleases.” (Song of Songs 2:2-7)

“AS A LILY AMONG THORNS, SO IS MY LOVE AMONG THE DAUGHTERS”

When we realize that we are nothing but a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys, living by God’s mercy and care, God will then bring us into deeper visions and experiences. He tells us, “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (2:2). When we walk by faith, we will become like a lily among thorns. That means we will encounter many situations along the way that are the result of mankind’s fallen condition.

Thorns are a result of God’s curse upon man when he fell. God

told Adam and Eve after they had fallen, “Thorns and thistles it [the earth] will bring forth for you” (Gen. 3:18). The mention of thorns in this verse in Solomon’s song reveals that although we are sanctified and trust in the Lord, we still walk among fallen mankind. Many people around us are just like thorns, and in our fallen condition, we are at times thorns to others as well. As long as we are living in the midst of man’s fallen nature, many situations will try us and even attempt to pierce us. But such situations should manifest that we are lilies.

When you are only for the Lord, for the church, and for living the divine life, you find that things are not so simple or easy. You find that your way is not turning out to be as wide and smooth as you thought. Instead, you realize that your way is like a “wilderness . . . a barren, thirsty ground, with thorns and briars over-spread” (*Hymns*, #207). Many things stab at you and seek your hurt, and many things give rise to tears and cause you to feel you cannot walk any further. However, you don’t have to be afraid; these environments will cause your growth. The Lord watches over the lilies and protects their steps. If you really give yourself to the Lord and truly love Him, then although thorns will continue to present themselves, they will help you to grow in life.

**“AS THE APPLE TREE AMONG
THE TREES OF THE WOOD, SO IS
MY BELOVED AMONG THE SONS”**

The Shulammitte responds, “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons: In his shade I delighted and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” She continues with the prayer, “Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love.”

The seeker’s need and experience begin with love and also end with love. This stage of her experience ends with increased enjoyment. She mentions “my beloved among the sons.” The sons refer to all the things that capture one’s heart. Among so many things

that are desirable and attractive, her beloved holds the first place in her heart.

Her beloved is “as the apple tree among the trees of the wood.” In the original language “apple” is a kind of fruit that comes from an evergreen plant. This indicates that the Lord’s life is unlimited and can never fail. Our Lord is “ever green.” His life is unlimited. This life will increase in us. Not only has He brought us into His chambers, not only is our couch green, not only are we in the house; now we are also among the trees of the wood experiencing joy. We are enjoying this unlimited life. The writer testifies, “How rich the life of my Lord is! How excellent He is! He is like the fruit of the evergreen among the trees of the wood.”

Brothers and sisters, when you first began to follow the Lord, you longed only for the feeling of the Lord’s presence. The Lord gave you some speaking, some leading, and some enlightenment. However, your enjoyment of life was limited until, due to the work of the cross and the help of the church, you entered into a further enjoyment of this life. At that point, your couch became green. Then as this unlimited life continued to grow in you, you could tell others, “The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are cypresses.” Now you are no longer in the smaller sphere where you were experiencing Christ primarily for yourself. Rather, you have entered into the enjoyment of the bountiful supply of life so that your whole being now can be for the church. You have grown in His life.

“IN HIS SHADE I DELIGHTED AND SAT DOWN”

Furthermore, the seeker delights and sits in the shade of her lover, whom she likens to this most lovely fruit tree. Verse 3 says, “In his shade I delighted and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” Originally she was in the chambers, and then she progressed to experience resting on the green couch. At this point in her experience, however, her beloved has become the prominent tree among the trees of the wood. His life has become her covering. When we come to experience the Lord in this way, we sit

down in His shade, and His life covers us, becoming our strength and even our delight. According to Watchman Nee, this refers to the rapture. Because of the riches of life, we are not only delighted, but we also feel we are experiencing heaven on earth. To our feeling, nothing could be higher than this.

If you remain in the experience of the king's chambers, your experience will be confined. As you progress, however, you will experience rest in life and the supply of life in your situations. Eventually, this life will overshadow you, and you will remain under its shade. Life will be under you, and it will be above you, and you will live in the realm of Christ's abundant and transcendent life.

“HIS FRUIT WAS SWEET TO MY TASTE”

This life that covers you also becomes your food. “His fruit was sweet to my taste” (2:3b). If a person has the experience of lying on the couch and sitting in the shade of life, he will not be bothered by his defects. If you cannot pray after losing your temper, it shows that you are still in the chambers; you haven't advanced.

When you enter into the riches of life, your life will manifest these riches. You will be able to be joyful even though you are weak, for this life makes you joyful. The divine life supplies you to remain in your joy. Your failure only helps you go to the Lord, and your weakness only prompts you to obtain more life from the Lord. When you are abiding in the sphere of life, even bondage becomes something that sets you free. If this is your experience, you have the reality of the heavens in your life.

“THE BANQUETING HOUSE”

The Lord will then bring us into the banqueting house. “Banqueting house” can also be translated “house of wine.” At first, the Lord brought us into His chambers, which was a personal experience. Now He brings us into the house of wine, which belongs to all His people. We can be joyful together with others in the house of wine. Individually, I experience the divine life. Corporately, I

also experience the divine life. Individually, I sit down in the shade of the Lord as a wonderful fruit tree, and His fruit is sweet to my taste. I feel like I am being raptured, for His life surrounds me. With others, I am brought into the banqueting house, the house of wine. Now I can enjoy the Lord unto perfection. I am no longer alone, but with all my brothers and sisters enjoying the Lord and experiencing His riches. I am so joyful, and so are all the brothers and sisters.

Brothers and sisters let me ask you, what is the church? A normal church is a banqueting house, a house of wine. It is the place where you can be satisfied and even be drunk in spirit. In this house of wine, you can enjoy the Lord in the midst of all the other saints. It is the place where, instead of bondage, there is satisfaction and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. It is the place that brothers and sisters treasure. In the church life you should not experience toil or sighing. Instead, you should experience satisfaction and joy.

“HIS BANNER OVER ME WAS LOVE”

Verse 4 says, “He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” The first section of Song of Songs is characterized by love. It begins, “Your love is better than wine.” It continues with being brought into his chambers and extolling the king’s love more than wine. However, in this section we are caught primarily by the feeling of love, but not yet the reality of love.

When you first consecrate yourself and experience something of the initial work of the cross, you experience being brought into the King’s chambers and enjoying the Lord’s life. Furthermore, you are brought into the church life and enjoy the riches of the brothers and sisters. At this time you can say, “Oh, Lord, Your banner over me is love. Your love prevails; it is inexhaustible. It covers me. I have a banner, which is love. Oh, Lord, how dearly do You love me! You loved me from the beginning. Today You still love me. How vast is Your love! How satisfying is Your love! Because You love me, I follow You. Oh, Lord, Your banner over me is love.” At this point you don’t have any problems, for the Lord’s love has

solved them all.

Why is it some people cannot believe in Jesus? It is because they don't trust His love. Why is it some believers can no longer go on? It is also due to the fact that they do not trust His love. Why do we sometimes balk at following the Lord, or only follow Him grudgingly? It is because we do not trust the love of the Lord. Although we believe in Him, we don't have faith that it is His love that measures everything to us. Therefore, we feel we could do better by acting in our own self-interest.

This seeker is different. Because of the work of God, she can say, "Lord, Your banner over me is love. If I am in suffering or difficulty, it is because of Your love. Your hand of love is in everything that surrounds me. Because of Your love, You bring me through every environment so that I can live before You absolutely." Brothers and sisters, a person who realizes that he is overshadowed by the Lord's banner of love is restful. He has tears before the Lord but they are the tears of joy. He can go on together with the Lord without any hesitation or fear.

The experience of the first section, which focuses on the Lord's love rather than the Lord Himself, ends with, "His banner over me was love." At this point, the seeker has experienced the Lord individually and corporately. The riches of the Lord and the church have brought her to the love of the Lord. Now she realizes she has a banner over her. To whom does she belong? She belongs to a love that will remain over her throughout her entire life.

**"SUSTAIN ME WITH RAISIN CAKES, REFRESH ME
WITH APPLES, FOR I AM SICK WITH LOVE"**

In this happiness, the Lord's seeker says, "Oh, Lord. How good is the banqueting house. How good are the fruits of the evergreen. How good it is to sit in Your shade. However, I am too happy to go on. I don't have the capacity to contain this love. I need You to support me." Now, the seeker knows she needs the help of others. Therefore she says, "Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples."

In the past she testified, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” Now, however, she is more experienced. She realizes that she needs strength to enjoy the Lord and to experience His riches. Therefore she turns to the church in order to continue enjoying the One she is seeking. The capacity of one individual to enjoy the Lord is limited. As long as we are joined to the church and live in the church life, however, the capacity of brothers and sisters becomes our capacity. So she cries out to her companions, “Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples.”

Raisin cakes indicate that this is a life through the winepress and a life broken by the cross. The process of going from vine to grape, from grape to raisin, and from raisin to cake also indicates that this is something of a mature life before the Lord. Brothers and sisters, those who have experienced many years of the Lord’s work can render real help to us. They are the ones having raisin cakes before the Lord as the result of experiencing His work. They can help us enlarge our capacity to enjoy the Lord, and they can help us sustain our enjoyment of the Lord.

The church cannot go on without the ones who have the raisin cakes. The more experienced saints there are in the church, the more capacity every brother and sister will be able to develop to enjoy the Lord. The more experienced saints there are in the church, the greater will be the saints’ ability to sustain the enjoyment of the Lord. Praise the Lord! He can help us and work on us through the brothers who have gone before us.

The Lord is the apple of this evergreen tree. “Refresh me with apples.” This phrase indicates that we need the Christ in the brothers and sisters. Our attitude towards the saints should be, “Please give me your Christ so that I can be enlarged. I need you as well as the Lord. Now my soul fails. I don’t know what to do. It seems that morning watch cannot help me, and my own prayer cannot sustain me. Even the weekly meetings cannot supply me enough. I need more. Oh, Lord, I am sick with love. Brothers and sisters, please help me to love the Lord. Oh, Lord, draw me more to love You. I don’t know how to love You. I want to give You more.” At this time, the seeking one seems despondent before the Lord. Although

she depends upon the Lord, she also needs more help from the brothers and sisters.

A Christian should have such a turn within the first year after he is saved. Within this year, he should know the cross and the breaking of the cross, and he should also know how to live in the church life. We should continue on more and more deeply in this cycle for all of our lives.

“HIS RIGHT HAND EMBRACES ME”

As a result, the seeker then experiences satisfaction: “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.” She is completely restful. In this position she can see only the Lord. She experiences the Lord not as her strength but as her satisfaction and rest in life. How sweet is this picture! She has had the experience of His kisses and has been in His chambers. She has also been through the effort of keeping her vineyard and has experienced wandering astray. She has gained the praise and admiration of the Lord. Plaits of ornaments have been made for her. She has lived in the love of the Lord and experienced the riches of life and the church life. She has also experienced living in the love of the Lord that will be with her all her life. All these experiences culminate in this union with the Lord.

Although this union has not reached its highest point, she indeed feels, “Oh, Lord, You are my banner now. I rest in You. I am secure in You. Now my eyes are upon You. No environment can affect me. I am restful in You. I can see You face to face. I can gaze on You and enjoy You.”

**“NOT TO ROUSE UP OR AWAKEN
MY LOVE UNTIL SHE PLEASES”**

At this time the Lord says, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the fields, not to rouse up or awaken my love until she pleases” (2:7). When a Christian has reached this stage, he tends to remain there for some time. He

enjoys the Lord every day. He considers the Lord wonderful. Other saints may not be so happy about him, for it seems he can do nothing but pray. Therefore the Lord forbids them to meddle with her.

The gazelles and the hinds of the fields are easily startled. When there is a little sound, they will run away. This indicates that such a saint is still young and easily startled. You have to be careful not to rouse up or awaken him. He is restful now in the presence of the Lord, and he is enjoying the sweetness of the Lord's presence. You should not complain about this or "awaken" him until he pleases. Is he a spiritual man? No. Has he matured yet? No. Has he grown up yet? No. He needs to press on. However, his pressing on takes time. It won't happen through someone's rebuking, reasoning, or preaching. He will eventually rouse himself and go forward.

FROM THE CHAMBERS TO THE BANQUETING HOUSE

This saint has now had some growth in life. He has experienced many things:

First, he has been attracted by the love of the Lord. In the beginning he said, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine." It was an experience of love. Then he realized, "The virgins love you," and he began to pursue the Lord in the church life. He further touched the love of the Lord and experienced being brought into the Lord's chambers, whereupon he said, "We will be glad and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine." This person has experienced the Lord's love. A person who doesn't know the love of the Lord has no experience at all before God. We cannot just go to the meetings and pray. We have to allow the love of the Lord to captivate us and saturate us. If we are to go on, our whole being needs to be in the love of the Lord.

Second, he has experienced fellowship with the Lord. He knows how to talk to the Lord and how to meet with Him. This was indicated also by his experience in the King's chambers.

Third, he has come to know the cross of the Lord. He has experienced having the plaits of gold and studs of silver made for

him. He now realizes that he continually needs the work of the cross.

Fourth, he has experienced a transfer of authority. The authority over him has been shifted from himself to the Lord. He has consecrated himself to the Lord, and the Lord has been given the first place in his life.

Fifth, he has some experience of the divine life. He knows how rich and precious this life is, as indicated by the green couch and the evergreen with its fruit. He also realizes that the divine life must sustain and support him if he is to go on pursuing the Lord.

Sixth, he has come to know the church. In the first section the seeker says, “The virgins love you.” The virgins are the church. The result of his being in the chambers is, “We will be glad and rejoice in you.” Reference to the church is made in every stage of his experience. The drawing of the Lord concludes with the church’s pursuing. The fellowship of the chambers concludes in the church’s appreciation. His testimony, “O daughters of Jerusalem...do not look at me, because I am black, because the sun has scorched me,” also involves the church. When the seeker says, “Our couch is green. The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are cypresses,” it refers to the church as God’s building. Even when the Lord’s seeker has the highest enjoyment in the banqueting house, the result is a realization that the saints are needed to maintain this experience—“Sustain me with raisin cakes!”

Seventh, the seeker has come to know himself. He is not self-centered anymore, nor does he have a very high opinion of himself as he did before. Because of the work of God’s grace, he admits humbly that he is but a “rose of Sharon.” He feels he is nothing but an ordinary brother in the church. By the mercy of God, he can go on with the saints. He also finds out that he is a “lily of the valleys.” Since he has seen the Lord’s faithfulness and love, he is able to set aside all his worries, doubts, struggles, and rash behavior. He now can rest in the mighty arms of the Lord and press on by faith.

Beyond all these items, he has also discovered that his capacity for experiencing the Lord is limited. Therefore, he is willing to give up his small world and enjoy with all the saints the breadth and

THE BANQUETING HOUSE

length and height and depth of Christ (Eph. 3:18). He not only draws life from the Head, but also receives the supply from the members of the Body. He has become more humble outwardly and been broadened inwardly. Hallelujah!

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COVERT

“The voice of my beloved! Now he comes, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart. Now he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, he is glancing through the lattice. My beloved responds and says to me, Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away; for now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines are in blossom—they give forth their fragrance. Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away. My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely. Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards while our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine, and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young hart on the mountains of Bethel.” (Song of Songs 2:8-17)

**INTRODUCTION—THE INITIAL
SELF-CENTERED EXPERIENCE**

Up to this point the seeking one has developed an understanding in seven areas of experience, which we saw in the previous message. However, the seeker has not progressed upward much in her experience, even though she feels she has gained a lot. From the Lord's vantage point she is still far off. She has passed through a number of experiences, but hasn't gone further. She has enjoyed the Lord's provision. She has come to know the Lord's love, His fellowship, the cross, His kingship, His life, the church, and even the Lord Himself. Nevertheless, she is still the reference point in her experience. It is she who knows the love of the Lord. It is she who has fellowship with the Lord. It is she who knows the cross. It is she who allows the Lord to be King. It is she who sees the loveliness of the church. It is also she who realizes that she is black on the one hand, and a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys on the other.

Brothers and sisters, it is normal for a newly saved one to be self-centered. A new believer's experience and enjoyment of the Lord are not focused on the Lord but on himself. He seeks his own satisfaction, not the Lord's. His concern is about what he needs, not what the Lord needs. In his Christian life what he wants, what he asks for, and what he is concerned about are himself. Thus we might say that he is just using the Lord, but his using of the Lord brings him into the Lord's presence.

Praise the Lord that He tolerates such a situation. Indeed, He is even very happy about it. He invites us to touch His love, to use Him, to enjoy Him, to experience Him, to come into His chambers, to experience the cross, to let Him be King, to know the church, and eventually to know about the self. The Lord is happy if we enjoy His provisions in such a way, even if we are being self-centered.

**FROM THE COMPLETE ENJOYMENT OF THE LORD
TO THE COMPLETE UNION WITH HIM**

Now we come to the second section of the Song of Songs. In this stage, the seeker begins to have progressively higher realizations as her knowledge and experience of the Lord advance. She was primarily self-centered in the first stage. In this second stage, the Lord calls her to rise up. The Lord wants her center of focus to shift from herself to Himself, from her satisfaction to His satisfaction, from the fellowship of the chambers to a deeper fellowship with Him, and from the initial knowledge of the cross to the real experience of the cross. In the past the church was for her; now she sees the church is for the Lord. Her Christian life is no longer on the plains, but is now climbing upward. She begins to live a progressively higher life before the Lord.

The second section begins with the calling of the Lord. It is a call for deliverance from the self. The Lord seems to tell her, "You need to be released from caring about your feeling, your enjoyment, your expectation of My presence, and even your joyful state with the brothers and sisters. From now on, I am going to build you up. I am going to work on you so that you can grow, mature, and stand up before Me. I have a request for you now. I want you to shift your center from your feeling to My desire. You do not exist for your own nourishment and satisfaction, nor do others exist for your care and blessing. You and I must be united in feeling, labor, and purpose. You have to become one with Me." Brothers and sisters, this brings in a big change to our Christian life.

In our spiritual experience, we cannot depart from two foundations. The first foundation we must have is a complete enjoyment of the Lord. The second foundation we must have is a complete union with Him. In the first stage of our Christian life we enjoy the Lord and His riches. In the second stage we become joined to Him and His purpose

**“NOW HE COMES, LEAPING UPON THE MOUNTAINS,
SKIPPING UPON THE HILLS”**

The foundation of the second stage is to build up something in us so that we can have the same feeling as the Lord. In the beginning of the second stage, the Lord reveals Himself as One who is coming to us leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills (2:8). He comes. He has prevailed and overcome all difficulties, all obstacles, and all hardships. Nothing can prevent His coming. He reveals that He is not only a Lord of the chambers, a Lord of enjoyment, and a Lord of love; He is also a Lord who leads us to rise up and overcome everything to live a heavenly, transcendent life. He can lead us to walk above everything in resurrection with Him.

“NOW HE STANDS BEHIND OUR WALL”

In verse 9 we are told, “Now he stands behind our wall.” He was leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills as the One who has overcome everything. When He arrives, however, He stands behind “our wall.” Our wall is our past experience. Yesterday’s experience and enjoyment become today’s wall. All the good, proper, and healthy things of the past become today’s wall, hindering our going on. Because of this, we continually need the Lord’s mercy.

Why is it so hard for the Lord to lead us to go on further with Him after we have had some experience of Him? It is because we have laid hold on those experiences. We treasure, enjoy, and respect our past experience of the Lord. We consider that those experiences are from the Lord, and therefore they have special value before Him. However, these experiences become a wall between us and the Lord. They frustrate the Lord from leading us on any further.

Brothers and sisters, every experience the Lord measures to you is either like spring or like winter. It is to prepare the way for further experience. Therefore you cannot stay where you are, and

you cannot cling to or treasure your past experiences. If you do, spontaneously they will become a wall standing between you and the Lord.

**“HE STANDS”—
HE IS READY FOR ACTION**

The Lord stands behind your wall. This indicates that He is ready for action; He is standing, not sitting. He stands there waiting for you. As soon as you are ready, He will immediately take action. As soon as you are ready, He will lead. As soon as you are ready, He will take you on another journey. As soon as you are ready, He will bring you on to another stage in your spiritual growth. The Lord is never idle when it comes to your going on. He is always ready to go.

The Shulammite testifies, “Now he comes, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.” The Lord here is not coming to feast with us. Instead, He is coming that we might go with Him to leap upon the mountains and skip upon the hills. He desires to constitute His riches, His transcendence, and His power into us in order that they might become our riches, our transcendence, and our power. He desires to have a deeper, more complete union with us. Through such a union we will enjoy not only His love and presence, but also His death and resurrection. Thus when He comes, He stands there and calls to us, “My beloved, are you ready to go?”

When the Lord invites us to go, no one is clear enough to respond immediately. Just think about it. Here is a brother with a lot of precious experiences. He has been experiencing the enjoyment of the banqueting house with all the saints. The Lord’s banner of love is spread over him. His testimony is that he is dwelling in the loving arms of the Lord. He also tells the saints, “You are my enjoyment, my raisin cakes, and my apples. It is so enjoyable to be with the Lord and with you all. We have had some wonderful building up and fellowship. We never quarrel or argue. We are in one accord and have become one another’s supply.” If at such a mo-

ment the Lord appears and says, “Let’s go,” the seeking one would surely be puzzled and ask, “Lord, do You really want me to go? Where do You want me to go to?” In fact we may not even be as spiritual as this, and perhaps would not even be able to see or hear the calling of the Lord while in such a state.

Brothers and sisters, when you do not have the presence of the Lord, it is much easier for you to respond. Without the Lord’s presence, it is so dry that you would like to leave that situation immediately. Then when the Lord asks you to go, you would follow Him without any hesitation. In this situation, however, the seeker is not weak or dry. She has the presence of the Lord. Everything is so sweet, so glorious, and so prevailing. Even “the vines are in blossom.” When everything is so bright and wonderful, and the Lord says, “Rise up, my love,” it is really hard for you to respond to His calling.

THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES ARE THE WALL BETWEEN US AND THE LORD

When the Lord does call to us in such a way, we respond, “Am I not fine now? Isn’t it nice here? Why are You asking me to go at this time? Are You sure?” There is indeed a wall between us and the Lord. What is this wall? It is not the world, nor is it sin. Instead, it is the most beautiful, most precious, and most triumphant spiritual experiences. These transcendent and satisfying experiences become a wall separating us from the Lord.

When the Lord first led us, we followed immediately, for we had a ready spirit. However, as soon as we entered into what the Lord led us into, it became a wall. This wall can include the enjoyment we lay hold of, the means and ways that work, and anything that gives us spiritual enjoyment or success so that we don’t need to rely upon the Lord. When do we have a wall? It is not while we are weak and dry. It is when we are overcoming, and we feel that we have a way. We are so sure about how to go on, and that becomes a wall. When such a situation arises, we cannot go on further with the Lord on a more heavenly way.

You have to remember that this wall is not outward but inward. For example, Brother Lee once told us frankly, “Don’t just shout in the meeting.” At the time we were releasing our spirit and singing joyfully. Why would Brother Lee ask us not to shout? Originally, that kind of shouting rendered us a lot of help. It helped us to break out of our oldness and to have rich, releasing, and satisfying meetings. We were so thankful for the practices of pray-reading and calling on the name of the Lord. They revived us and helped us to open to the Lord. Because of pray-reading and calling on the Lord’s name we were so blessed. However, Brother Lee realized that even our way of pray-reading and calling on the name of the Lord could become a wall separating us from going on further with the Lord. In our enjoyment of these things, we might have just remained where we were and become reluctant to go on.

In principle, every spiritual experience you have can become a wall preventing you from going on further. The more you grow in the Lord, the fewer walls you will have, for you gradually learn that there is always something more that the Lord wants to bring you into. If you want to hold onto something you gained from these very messages, for example, it will become a wall preventing the Lord from taking you on further.

If you really desire to follow the Lord, you have to come before Him often and ask, “Is there a wall between us? If there is one, please break it down completely. Even if it is the highest experience, the sweetest feeling, or the largest work, I do not want it. I would rather throw it away so that there is no wall between us.”

**“HE IS LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDOWS;
HE IS GLANCING THROUGH THE LATTICE”**

On the one hand, the Lord is standing behind our wall. On the other hand, He is looking through the windows and glancing through the lattice (2:9). In this state we can see Him and He can see us. He calls to us, grants us revelation, and allows us to see His face while encouraging us to rise up. We do not want to follow Him, however, for we are spiritually comfortable with what we have.

It is difficult for us to leave behind something we are presently experiencing. It seems that it gets into our blood and we just cannot let it go. The Lord is restless, anxiously hoping that we will notice Him and turn our gaze upon Him. But alas! We are still focused on some teaching we have enjoyed, our present spiritual condition, the brothers and sisters, our practices, or what we have experienced of the Lord thus far. We do not notice that He is impatiently waiting for us. He calls urgently to us, “Come!” but we do not realize or understand. How poor is our situation!

**“RISE UP, MY LOVE, MY BEAUTY,
AND COME AWAY”**

The Lord allows us not only to see Him but also to hear Him, for He calls to us, saying, “Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away” (2:10). Here the Lord praises His seeker and calls her His beauty. The Lord considers her beautiful and lovely. She is very attractive, so the Lord says, “Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away.”

**1. “For Now the Winter Is Past;
the Rain Is Over and Gone”**

Verse 11 continues, “For now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone.” You may have thought those experiences were something of the springtime. The Lord, however, tells you that your abiding in them should be considered a time of winter. It is as if the Lord is saying, “Your experiences, your enjoyment, your supply, and your boasting should stop. The winter is past. The rain is also over and gone. You will not get the supply, nourishment, or watering if you stay in these things any longer.”

Brothers and sisters, when you first got saved, you could weep as you thought about the Lord. After being revived in your spiritual life, you might have wept again as your love for Him was renewed. However, you don’t need to seek to return to those situations. That rain is over and gone. It is useless to wish for it or to pray for it. If

you ask the Lord that you might experience it again, the Lord will reply, “Don’t ask to experience My mercy in this way again. I will not sympathize with you in this matter.” Brothers and sisters, what you treasured, what was most sweet, what helped you before—all are gone. The Lord is now saying, “Rise up and come away. The rain is over and gone. I won’t water, nourish, and bless you in the way I did before. The rain that blessed you before has stopped now. It is over and gone. The matter you enjoyed before has come to an end.”

2. “Flowers Appear on the Earth”

Although this is a sober time, it is also a time of beauty. “Flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land” (2:12). The appearing of flowers indicates that the abundant life has become manifested among the saints. God has an eternal purpose, and the purpose is carried out through the saints’ transformation. When you are with the saints, you should have a feeling that flowers are appearing on the earth!

3. “The Time of Singing Has Come”

Next we are told, “The time of singing has come” (2:12). At such a time, people praise God, and their praise is real and practical. Such praising is beautiful before the Lord. It is just like music. “The time of singing has come!”

4. “The Voice of the Turtledove Is Heard in Our Land”

Furthermore, “The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land” (2:12). The voice of the turtledove represents love. This love does not only exist between you and the Lord, but also between the Lord and the brothers and sisters. When you hear the voice of the turtledove, you hear the singing and the songs of love. Praise the Lord for the flowers, the singing, and the voice of the turtledove!

**5. “The Fig Tree Has Ripened Its Figs,
and the Vines Are in Blossom”**

There are also two words of encouragement. First, the Lord tells us that the fig tree has ripened its figs. Second, He says that the vines are in blossom (2:13). You are like the fig tree that has ripened its figs. Some further manifestation has taken place in you. It doesn't mean you have become fully mature in life, but it does indicate that you have achieved ripeness in the experience of this stage. Now you should go on to another experience with the Lord: it is time for you to have fruit now, for your vines are in blossom.

Praise the Lord for these five points in verses 11 through 13. First, the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone. Second, flowers appear on the earth. Third, the time of singing has come. Fourth, the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. And fifth, the fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines are in blossom. How wonderful are these five points! The Lord repeatedly tells us, “Do not remain with what is past, for what lies ahead is even brighter and more glorious.” We have to go on persistently and labor on into the riches of Christ.

The Lord repeats, “Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away” (2:13). Since she now has some manifestation in life, the Lord finds her attractive. His desire is that she would go with Him and manifest His life on the earth.

“MY DOVE”

In verse 14 the Lord refers to the Shulammitte as His dove. The Lord once said her eyes were like the eyes of a dove. Now she becomes a dove. In the eyes of the Lord, she is truly beautiful now. Not only her eyes but also her whole person is pure. We don't see as the Lord does; we do not think we are like doves. However, the Lord says, “You are like a dove. I am going to work in you and make you a dove.”

Therefore He says, “My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see your countenance, let me hear

your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely” (2:14). The Lord is telling His dove that she needs two things: the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. The clefts of the rock symbolize our union with the Lord in His death on the cross. Our going to the covert of the precipice indicates that we are able to resurrect and ascend with Him to go to a place which cannot be reached by ordinary men. When we attain to the covert of the precipice, we enjoy all of Christ’s riches in resurrection and ascension.

“THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK”

The rock is the Lord himself. The clefts of the rock are the place where we can be joined with the Lord. When we first loved the Lord, the union between us was an affiliation of love, but it was not yet a true union. Here the Lord asks us to enjoy not only His love but also Himself. We need to be joined in union with Him. In this union we not only enjoy the riches of His love; we also experience what He has gone through.

The Lord’s desire to see us in the clefts of the rock shows us that all the experiences of the Lord should be ours also. We should experience how He humbled himself, suffered, was despised, and was reproached. Therefore we need to experience being joined with the Lord in the clefts of the rocks, which is to be in union with Christ at His cross.

If we compare our experience of Christ here to what is described in chapter one, we will see that the experience of chapter one is very shallow in comparison. Here the Lord calls us into union with Him, a union that is far beyond the seeker’s past union with the Lord through merely being in love with Him. In this union through the clefts of the rock, all of Christ’s experiences become our experiences. We go through what the Lord went through. We weep as He wept. We are struck and misunderstood as He was. The Lord desires to see us in the clefts of the rock, that is, He desires that through the union of the cross we would experience what He experienced.

Brothers and sisters, this is the beginning of an arduous journey.

Your Christian life eventually requires you to have a union with the death of the Lord. Every day the cross should work in you as you experience the Lord's word in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." We need to grow together with Him in the likeness of His death, if we are to be with Him in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom. 6:5).

"THE COVERT OF THE PRECIPICE"

The Lord desires to find us not only in the clefts of the rock but also in the covert of the precipice. The precipice is a place to which ordinary men cannot climb, but the Lord is there. The word "covert" indicates fellowship. Therefore the meaning of the phrase "in the covert of the precipice" can be interpreted "in the fellowship of the precipice." In other words, it means "in the fellowship of resurrection," for the precipice represents the central height to which the Lord attained in His resurrection.

The Lord is in the "clefts of the rock," and He expects that we would also join Him there. He expects us to experience His death on the cross. He is also in the "covert of the precipice," expecting us to join Him in experiencing the power and riches of His resurrection. He expects that we would become united with Him, so that He could see our countenance and hear our voice in this union with Him.

If the Lord only asked us to pick up our cross and follow Him, it would be too hard for us. Praise Him! Although we must experience the cross, we do so with the experience of the abundant life of resurrection. We experience the cross, but we experience it with resurrection! When we face hardship, we have the assurance that the resurrected Lord is faithful. When we suffer the blow that brings us into the experience of His death, we also experience Him in His resurrection. We cannot be in one without the other. We are not only in the clefts of rock but also in the covert of the precipice. To follow Him in this way is to come all the way from the banqueting house to the clefts of rock and the covert of the precipice, and

to grow from abiding in some enjoyment of the Lord's riches into actual union with Him.

Brothers and sisters, don't dwell upon how much the Lord has accomplished in you or how much enjoyment you have experienced. You have to realize that we are walking on the pathway of the cross. We have to be prepared to die like the Lord. However, this death is experienced in resurrection. It is in the covert of the precipice, a place which ordinary men have no way to reach. We are in the heavens with the Lord to experience the suffering of the cross on earth. Thus our fellowship with the Lord in this union becomes so intimate. This is the experience of the covert of the precipice.

**“LET ME SEE YOUR COUNTENANCE,
LET ME HEAR YOUR VOICE”**

In this stage, the Lord says, “Let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice.” One's countenance is his outward appearance, and his voice is the inward presentation. The Lord wants to look upon us outwardly and inwardly. He likes to know us in both aspects. He desires to enjoy our countenance and our voice.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is asking you to give your whole person to Him. The Lord wants to lead you into death inwardly and outwardly, and into His resurrection. After you experience union with Christ in His death and resurrection, you will become a person tender, sweet, and lovely both inwardly and outwardly. When we experience the death and resurrection of the Lord, our voice becomes sweet. We can express something real when our praise to the Lord issues from genuine experience. Our voice becomes sweet and our outward countenance becomes lovely as a result of this inward change.

“CATCH THE FOXES”

Verse 15 says, “Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards while our vineyards are in blossom.” The Lord has

called His seeker to escape from her feelings, her experiences, her past assurances, and whatever else had become important to her. The Lord has called her to walk the way of the cross in union with Him so that she might enter into the experience of resurrection. As a result, the Lord is attracted by her more manifest comeliness.

Her eyes, however, are upon the vineyards. She treasures the perfection and completion of her work. Therefore she says the vineyards are in blossom, but the foxes are making trouble. Foxes here represent the human flesh. They can represent, for example, the zealous ones, not controlled by the Spirit, who kill the meetings with their teachings of dead letter. According to the Shulammité's understanding, as long as there are no fleshy ones making trouble, the Spirit in the church life will be released and the work will advance. Nevertheless the Lord reminds her, "Don't focus on the work!"

The Lord did not endorse her earlier concern about her vineyard either (1:6). Here, at the end of chapter 2, she still has not learned this lesson, for she is still concerned about the blossoming vineyards. We tend to take notice of the blossoms, but not the grapes. We cannot just produce blossoms. We have to produce grapes for the life supply. Although this saint has had considerable experience, she is still focused upon the work, thinking about how to catch the little foxes.

Her heart is not pure at this time. The Lord seems to be telling her, "You should want nothing but Me. You should walk the way of the cross with Me and experience all My sufferings and all My riches in resurrection." Alas! How poor and shallow we are. How easy it is for us to miss Him. While the Lord is calling, we reply, "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards while our vineyards are in blossom." The seeker of the Lord is still concerned about the work, and she forgets the Lord's desire that she continue to go higher. Instead, she worries about what to do with the vineyards. She forgets the Lord's calling. As long as she is still trapped in the work and satisfied by a little achievement and progress, she will be unable to experience the riches of Christ's ascension and the glory of His resurrection.

“MY BELOVED IS MINE, AND I AM HIS”

There is one thing about her that cannot be faulted at this point: she still has a sweet relationship with the Lord. She says, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (2:16). Why can she say this? It is because of her past experience. She is still in the banqueting house, and the banner over her is still love. She has the raisin cakes and apples from the saints to sustain her. The Christ in the saints and the Lord Himself is her enjoyment. She is positioned in a place full of enjoyment. Therefore she says, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.”

Someone trapped in works cannot know his real situation. His work becomes the wall separating him from the Lord. Why does such a person still seem to sense the Lord’s sweetness? It is because his focus on the work forces him to go to the Lord. It is not that the Lord is truly his beloved, and that he is the Lord’s. While he is serving, he *has* to go and ask the Lord about the meetings, the labor, the care for the saints, and so on. Seemingly it brings him into a situation where he feels that the Lord is his and he is the Lord’s, but this sensation will eventually collapse, for it is like the house built upon the sand.

“THE MOUNTAINS OF BETHER”

The Lord has told her clearly, “Now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone,” and has asked to see her countenance and hear her voice in the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. Her answer, however, is, “Oh Lord, I am sorry. I cannot follow You right now, although I am willing.” Thus in verse 17 she says, “Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.” She realizes that the Lord is calling her, but she is too busy to follow. She knows the Lord desires a deeper union with her and is asking her to live in resurrection together with Him, but she cannot leave her work. She wants to follow, but lacks the ability to do so. Therefore she cries out, “Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away,

turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.”

“Bether” means “full of valleys.” This must refer to all the experiences the Lord has gone through—His suffering, scourging, death on the cross, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. The seeker of the Lord has only the terms of these experiences, but not their reality. She is not even interested in entering into their reality. She is still saturated with the enjoyment of the banqueting house, where she continues to extol His love. She is still focused on the raisin cakes and apples the saints provide for her refreshment. She is still living on the plain rather than the mountain. Although she knows the Lord is calling her upward, her experience is, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:14). Therefore she has no choice but to cry out, “Oh, Lord, until the day dawns and the shadows flee away, please turn on the mountains of Bether. At that time, take away all that comes between us so that I may yet enjoy the riches and glory of resurrection. I do desire that all You intend for me would become my reality!”

CHAPTER SIX

SEEKING HIM NIGHT AFTER NIGHT

“On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. I will rise now and go about in the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen who go about in the city found me—have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held him and would not let go until I had brought him into my mother’s house and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the fields, not to rouse up or awaken my love until she pleases.” (Song of Songs 3:1-5)

INTRODUCTION

Our God is serious and absolute. If He wants you, He will put you in His heart and in His hand and will work on you until He has completely gained you. Even the wonderful experiences of Christ we have already enjoyed cannot prevent the Lord from taking us on to the more wonderful experiences of Him that lie ahead of us. He will definitely accomplish and achieve His desire. Although sometimes we are preoccupied with spiritual work, He is able to save us

even from this, and He will give Himself to us when we turn to Him. He will be our uttermost enjoyment and satisfaction.

In chapter 2, verses 10-14, the Lord said to His seeker, “Rise up, my love, my beauty, and come away; for now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. . . . My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely.” The Lord asked her to come away, but she responded, “Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards while our vineyards are in blossom” (2:15). She was so satisfied with the sweet experience of the vineyards that she ignored the Lord’s calling. Therefore, the Lord left.

The seeker held on to her previous experience of the Lord, causing it to become a wall separating her from Him. She treasured that experience of the Lord so much that she ignored Him when He called her to rise up, come away, and go on with Him. It was as if she were holding on to something of the Lord while He stood outside her window calling to her.

It seems as if there were two Lords—the one whom she experienced within the wall and the one who was calling to her outside the wall. She could only see the Lord whom she loved so much within the wall. She only cherished this sweet experience and was afraid of little foxes ruining the vineyard while it was in blossom. She did not understand the Lord’s expectation and His need outside the wall. The Lord was calling the maiden again and again, yet she ignored Him, although perhaps not purposely. Therefore, the Lord could do nothing but leave.

**“ON MY BED NIGHT AFTER NIGHT
I SOUGHT HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVES”**

To her surprise, when the Lord retreated, she lost her inner feeling of His presence. Suddenly, all the feelings of sweetness and enjoyment were gone, and she was left alone there feeling empty and helpless. Her response to this sudden change was to seek Him. Verse 1 says, “On my bed night after night I sought him whom my

soul loves.” “Bed” here refers to her previous experience and sweet fellowship with the Lord. A bed is the place where someone can lay down his work and enjoy rest. It depicts man’s self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. If you are in your bed, you are not likely to be interested in rising up and going on.

Although her service was full of the Lord’s presence before, this presence became her bed. She was so self-satisfied on her bed that it became a hindrance to her following the Lord. She thought that the Lord’s presence, His loveliness, and the spiritual experiences were enough until this stage. She didn’t know that the Lord is inexhaustible. Although she could continue her spiritual life as before, although outwardly her life was not different, the reality—the Lord Himself and His presence—was gone.

Therefore, she began to seek the Lord. But she still sought Him on her bed. She couldn’t find him. According to her concept, there must be something wrong with her spiritual life. However, her spiritual life was not the problem; she was the problem. The problem was her unwillingness to answer the Lord’s calling. She was unwilling to leave everything and follow the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, this is serious. Many of us cherish the goodness and sweetness of our “bed.” We cherish those wonderful spiritual experiences. However, we should only treasure the Lord Himself. Without the Lord on the bed, it is empty. It is a pity that many are holding on to their beds instead of the Lord. Some people enjoy the sweetness of praying so much that they care for nothing but praying, even if it means ignoring the Lord. If a brother asks such a one to go with him to visit a saint, that person will consider it an interruption to his intimate fellowship with the Lord, and will chafe at this brother’s interruption. He will ask the Lord to catch the little foxes—meaning anything that interrupts his “fellowship” with the Lord. Even if the interruption is from the Lord, he hopes that the Lord would take it away and bind it. This is what happens when our bed replaces the Lord’s authority and preeminence in our lives.

Could the Lord tolerate this? No. Therefore, He left His seeker. Although the bed was still there, the Lord’s presence was not.

Although she could pray as before, she had lost the sweetness of the Lord's presence in her prayer. By means of such severe spiritual discipline, we learn not to rest on any past spiritual experiences. Our spirit must closely follow the Lord.

We always think that obeying the Lord requires us to pay a stiff price. We don't realize that it is more costly if we refuse. The loss that comes from disobedience far exceeds the price we pay to obey. For example, when Abraham disobeyed God's call to leave his country and kindred, God took his father away. When Abraham listened to Sarah and disobeyed God by having a child through her handmaid, the result was Ishmael, someone who later persecuted Isaac, the child born according to promise.

In the Song of Songs the Lord asked the Shulammitte to follow His way of the cross. He requested that she experience His being put to shame, His suffering, His being despised, and His loneliness. But she thought the price was too high to pay. She didn't realize that if she obeyed, the power of resurrection would uphold her and the heavenly strength would protect her. The grace of the Lord would supply her to follow Him. Pitifully, she failed to obey at this crucial moment. Hence, she had to pay the severe penalty of the loss of the Lord's presence. This is a painful experience for those who think they love Him with their whole heart.

Here in chapter 3, the maiden has grown in life to the point that the Lord is able to deal with her further. Because of her disobedience, the spiritual discipline comes to her—the Lord's presence is taken away. Since the Lord's presence as the One outside the wall is gone, so is His presence as the One inside the banqueting house. Actually, the action of the Lord within and without the wall is the same. The grace that the Lord supplies us within the wall is for us to be able to answer His call to rise up and come away to the next stage in our pursuing. However, if we cannot obey, the grace within the wall will be taken away.

In response, she seeks the Lord everywhere. Pitifully, she thinks her "bed" is insufficient. She doesn't realize that her unwillingness to answer the Lord's calling is the cause of the Lord's absence. She seeks the Lord by trying to improve her spiritual exercise rather

than by acknowledging her disobedience. Perhaps where she once had the Lord's presence at morning watch, she feels so dry now. Taking this as a result of her laziness, she tries to wake up earlier, but in vain. Then she feels, maybe her reading of the Bible is the problem, so she reads as much as possible. However, that doesn't work either.

In spite of her trying, the Lord has no response, because the bed is not the problem. Rather, her response to the Lord's calling is the problem. Her spiritual life is not the problem; her disobedience is the problem. The Lord has called, "My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice." If the Lord calls you in this way, you have no excuse; you must respond. If the Lord wants you to go on, you must go on. There is no room for analyzing or reasoning. What you need is to follow. Your disobedience will cause you to suffer. It is useless to try to increase your spiritual activities.

**"I WILL RISE NOW AND
GO ABOUT IN THE CITY"**

Now she realizes that the solution is not to adjust her spiritual life. Therefore she says, "I will rise up now and go about in the city." She has paid a real price for not following the Lord. The loss of the Lord's presence has made her feel frustrated and helpless. On the one hand, she has no taste for the world. On the other hand, she cannot gain the Lord's presence. She is so troubled because she can gain nothing that she desires. Unless she goes forth to seek the Lord, she can no longer rest.

"I SOUGHT HIM, BUT FOUND HIM NOT"

Then she rises up and goes about in the city, in the streets and in the squares, and seeks Him whom her soul loves. The city here refers to the church, and the streets and the squares indicate the display and exhibition of the saints' rich experience of Christ (cf. Prov. 8:1-4). She seeks the Lord within the church. She thinks she

can find the Lord she loves among brothers and sisters. Perhaps she goes to a brother and says, “Oh, brother, my Lord disappeared, what should I do?” Because this brother is good at pray-reading, he suggests that the solution is to pray-read, to eat the word. However, no matter how hard she tries to pray-read, the Lord’s smile remains hidden from her. Then, another suggests, “You should call upon the name of the Lord.” Yet though she calls long and hard, there is still no answer. Then, a sister who enjoys weeping before the Lord says, “You just need to weep before the Lord.” Yet in spite of so many tears, she still cannot recover the Lord’s presence. This is the meaning of, “I sought him, but found him not.” Although she tries in every way, she just cannot find the Lord.

Oh, brothers and sisters, this is serious. We cannot take the matter of the Lord’s calling carelessly. If the Lord asks us to join with Him on the pathway of His cross, if He asks us to unite with Him in His suffering or His being put to shame, we have to obey. He wants to see our countenance. Otherwise, He will remove His presence from us. No matter how we confess our sins or how we deal with the Lord, until we obey, He will not answer. He will only ask, “Are you really following Me?” Once we obey Him, the problem is solved. When we follow Him, then we will immediately have the Lord’s presence again.

What God focuses on is your obedience to His will. To deal with trivial things is not His focus. If you are unwilling to fully consecrate yourself and follow Him, you remain wrong in the sight of God, and you will be a useless vessel. In this circumstance, regardless how good your behavior may be, how holy you are, or how much spiritual activity you may engage in, it will all be in vain. It is useless for you to be zealous, to be good at stirring up a meeting, or to try to visit and take care of the saints. It will even be useless for you to try to serve full-time. You need to fear God and cooperate with Him absolutely. You should care for His will regardless of your gain or loss. The way of the Lord will be open to you only when you count all things to be loss.

Yet the Shulammite hadn’t discovered that her being deprived of the Lord’s presence was not caused by some item in her spiri-

tual life. She did not see that she herself was the problem. Although she went about in the city, in the streets, or in the squares seeking her beloved, she did not find Him. Although she tried to imitate others' calling upon the name of the Lord, pray-reading, singing, and praying, she was unable to recover her sweet fellowship with the Lord. She could not recover His presence. As a matter of fact, the Lord didn't lead her to read more, pray more, call upon Him more, or to be more zealous. His call was for her to rise up and pay the price of following in the way of the cross. He desired that she experience the bitterness of death and the glory of resurrection. His intention was to deliver her from herself and to help her enter into His rich and fresh supply.

**“THE WATCHMEN WHO GO ABOUT
IN THE CITY FOUND ME”**

Now she was so troubled that she tried every way to find Him, but it was still in vain. Would she lose the Lord's presence forever? No. Although our Lord is fearful, He is also lovely. He will not break the bruised reed, nor will He quench the smoking flax (Matt. 12:20). When she had no way out, the Lord recovered her. The Lord helped her through other brothers and sisters. He helped her through the saints who had the same heart that He did, the saints who were fully united with His will.

The brothers and sisters who helped the maiden had deeply experienced the Lord. Unlike those with little experience, they possessed the heart and mind of Christ Jesus. Instead of trying to help the seeker in her zeal and outward behavior, they brought her to the Lord and led her to His way. Those lacking experience can only give suggestions, but those in union with the Lord are able to bring others into union with Him.

It is marvelous that whenever we have no way out and no way to go on, one of the brothers will come to us. They are the watchmen who go about in the city. Being the servants of the Lord, they take care of the church. Also, they raise up the young saints. They know that the problem is not your pursuit and exercise, but your

disobedience and your unwillingness to deny yourself. Initially you may not think that their fellowship fits you or is applicable to your situation. Instead, you feel that their answer doesn't meet your need and that they don't understand what your problem is. It seems to you that their fellowship is just teaching from older Christians.

As a matter of fact, they really do know your problem. They are spiritual men, who are able to discern all things and see through you. However, because you are still young in the Lord, you are not perceptive enough to receive the enlightenment until they leave. Then suddenly you feel so clear and free. Finally, you have found the answer that really helps you. Your long toil and burden are past. Now the Lord is smiling upon you again. The winter is past and the spring has come. Everything is recovered. It is as sweet and attractive as before. Oh, what an enjoyment and rest!

“I HELD HIM AND WOULD NOT LET GO”

Verse 4 tells us, “Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held him and would not let go until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her who conceived me.” Her experience here is deeper than before, yet still not a heavenly one. If it were, she would have no more to experience. She still attempts to recover her previous experiences—holding Him and not letting go. She is fearful that the Lord will disappear again if she lets go of Him. This indicates how we hold on to our experiences. It is not easy for us to lay down our good experiences to receive what is freshly coming from the Lord.

Everything we consider wonderful and are unwilling to let go of will become a problem one day. Our secret of touching the Lord and gaining His presence today will become a hindrance in the future. If you just try to hold on to what you have experienced, you will not grow.

This was the Shulammitte's situation. Although the Lord asked her to leave her previous experience, she instead replied, “Catch the little foxes.” Then the Lord left, and she began to seek Him. However, she only sought Him on her bed, ignoring His request

that she join Him in the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. She sought the Lord's presence in every way except the way that He desired. Thank the Lord for His mercy. After she suffered for a period of time, the Lord appeared to her again. At this time she held the Lord and would not let go. She was in the chambers again. It seems that she was back in chapter 1, afraid of losing the Lord's presence. However, she now had some growth. She had gone on further with the Lord during her period of searching.

When we look at her condition in chapter 1, we can realize that she was self-satisfied even when she testified, "Our couch is green and so are our cedar and cypresses. Our love is green and full of freshness and hope. I am a lily, while others are thorns. The building of the church cannot take place without me." She was so self-satisfied that she didn't realize the meaning of humility and obedience.

Now, however, she has learned to humble herself due to the experience of being in the covert of the precipice, and she begins to fellowship with the members of the body. In chapter one, she was enjoying the Lord so much in her own way that she didn't know how to be with others. But here, because she has experienced being in the covert of the precipice, she has a deeper realization of being nothing, fallen, and corrupted. She also has more realization of the riches of Christ. She has seen the beauty of the members of the body. She is no longer self-centered, as she was in chapter 1, nor is she so caught up in the experience of the chambers. In chapter 1, it was the Lord who drew her, and she enjoyed loving Him. But now, she loves the Lord without His drawing, and He enjoys her love.

Due to God's mercy, she experienced the suffering of the cross—loneliness, dryness, and poverty. She could do nothing but be with the brothers and sisters. She can now receive help from others with more experience. Originally, she thought she alone belonged to the Lord, while others belonged to the work or religion. Now she realizes that the "sons of my mother" were her help. She is no longer self-centered; now the Lord is her center. She has seen

something further about how to live before the Lord and among the saints. She is no longer independent of the Lord or merely an individual among the brothers and sisters.

Now she dares not leave the Lord. She cannot walk without the presence of the Lord. If the Lord is still with her, she is joyful. If He seems to be gone, she becomes so nervous that she has to stop and call, “Oh, Lord,” until she senses Him again. She is still bound by her feelings. She doesn’t yet realize that the Lord’s presence is always with her.

**“UNTIL I HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO
MY MOTHER’S HOUSE AND INTO THE CHAMBER
OF HER WHO CONCEIVED ME”**

The seeker is entering into grace (“my mother’s house”) and life (“the chamber of her who conceived me”) more deeply. Here “mother” refers to grace (Gal. 4:26). Now she feels that everything is due to grace, not due to her ability or faithfulness. Her experience here is deeper than when she was in the banqueting house. Her realization of the Lord has become different. Although this is not an experience in ascension, it is in the clefts of the rock and is a spiritual advancement. She is no longer limited in her own enjoyment and work, for now she realizes that her relationship with the Lord is by grace.

Since she has experienced the abundance of life, she has been delivered from herself and has begun to walk the way of the cross. Therefore, her experience is no longer on the plain in the banqueting house. She has advanced to another dimension, for she has experienced the power of resurrection. This experience has led her further and made her leap. She manifests the condition of being good for the Lord’s building. Now she is really in the Lord’s heart. He loves her and has gained much in her. Thus the Lord says, “O daughters of Jerusalem, do not rouse up or awaken my love. She should rest, because she suffered so much. Then she can begin another stage of experience.”

Thank the Lord that when the seeker has such an enjoyment,

she manifests the condition of being in union with the Lord as seen in 3:6-11—coming up from the wilderness, like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant. She also becomes Solomon’s bed, emptying and pouring out herself fully. She is filled with the Lord Himself. Her spiritual condition has advanced, and she has entered a higher degree of manifestation.

Brothers and sisters, from this portion we realize that if we have the experience of being saved and of loving the Lord, yet being apart from the Lord, we are miserable. If we think that a taste of the Lord’s love and comfort is sufficient and good enough for us, we are miserable. If we become self-satisfied and complacent just with a little achievement, we are miserable. If we consider that some accomplishment is sufficient for our whole serving life, we are miserable. If we do not realize the importance of spiritual growth, we are just miserable Christians.

The riches of the Lord are inexhaustible. We will always be able to experience and enjoy Him further. May we be poor in spirit; let us be humble and empty ourselves before the Lord and say, “Lord, I am nothing, but You are all. Fill me every moment so that I can fully express You.” We should have Paul’s aspiration, “Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (Phil. 3:13-14). May we encourage and exhort each other in this way so that all the riches of the Lord may become our reality. Amen!

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WILDERNESS

“Who is she who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant? There is Solomon’s bed; sixty mighty men surround it, of the mighty men of Israel. All of them wield the sword and are expert in war; each man has his sword at his thigh because of the night alarms. King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon. Its posts he made of silver, its bottom, of gold; its seat, of purple; its midst was inlaid with love from the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, yes, on the day of the gladness of his heart. Oh, you are beautiful, my love! Oh, you are beautiful! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which have borne twins, and none of them is bereaved of her young. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely; your cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate

behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory; a thousand bucklers hang on it, all the shields of the mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies. Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away, I, for my part, will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.” (Song of Songs 3:6—4:6)

**THE EXPERIENCES OF
THE THIRD STAGE—THE MOUNTAIN OF MYRRH
AND THE HILL OF FRANKINCENSE**

The spiritual experiences of the first and second stages portrayed in the Song of Songs are interrelated; they cannot be separated from one another. When you come to the second stage, you still will sense that you need to return to the experience of being kissed by the Lord, to be with Him at His table, and to be under His banner of love in the banqueting house. Furthermore, you will sense that you need more experience of the Lord’s death and resurrection, that is, to be found in the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. Brothers and sisters, the first two chapters of the Song of Songs are for us to experience again and again for the rest of our lives, because they form the foundation of all our spiritual pursuing. But now, in this message, we come to the seeker’s experiences in the third stage of her pursuing, in which she has moved well beyond her experiences in the first and second stages.

In the third stage, the most important experience is that of the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense (4:6), for they indicate a fuller union with the Lord in His death and resurrection. After passing through the experiences of the first three chapters, a major change takes place. We become more useful in the Lord’s hands, and others also recognize that something precious has been wrought into us. Our prayer in this stage becomes, “Oh, Lord, I allow Your cross to do its complete work in me; I long to live a life completely in Your death and resurrection.”

**“SHE WHO COMES UP
FROM THE WILDERNESS”**

The third stage begins with the experience of coming up from the wilderness. In verse 6, someone asks, “Who is she who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?” The wilderness is a place of wandering. To come up from the wilderness means to forsake the wandering life and to enter into the rest of the Lord. The words in this section are not spoken by the Shulammite maiden, nor by the king, but by a third party. This indicates that when we become broken before the Lord, our condition of brokenness becomes manifested to others, and the Spirit is able to testify through the saints, “Here is a person who has left Egypt and entered into Canaan. The world cannot occupy him or affect him. He is separated from the world. Now he lives in the riches of Christ.” The saints will recognize that here is someone coming up from the wilderness!

A person who comes up from the wilderness has a clear purpose. His life is a purposeful journey that takes the good land as its goal. His aim is to gain all the riches of the Lord. He will continue forward on this journey regardless of suffering, tears, or any attempt to influence him towards another direction. For such a person this world holds nothing.

Brothers and sisters, the experience of coming up from the wilderness may seem to be so spiritual that we cannot attain it. However, when we are separated from the world and are seeking the Lord alone, this experience spontaneously becomes ours. Once we have put aside our future and no longer have any plan for ourselves, we will bear the mark of someone who is coming up from the wilderness.

We owe our separation to the Spirit’s working, which enables us to bear such a living testimony before men. However, there is no need for us to bear such testimony to ourselves; others will bear witness that we are coming up from the wilderness. What should absorb us is simply to walk this pathway unto the end. May we

have the Lord's mercy to see that the world is a wilderness, where our efforts will only result in useless wandering. Although we are in the world, we should not be of it; we should be those who are coming up from the wilderness. God alone must be the center of our life, for all else is meaningless.

If the world does not seem to us a wilderness, we are in an unhealthy condition. If we are caught by the world, we will not be able to function properly before the Lord. A normal Christian should always feel that the world is a wilderness. Whether rich or poor, whether in joy or sorrow, we should never allow ourselves to be deceived by the world. Our goal is the holy city, where the Lord alone is king. Nothing else should capture our heart. If you are one who has come up from the wilderness, then nothing can touch you, for your focus is fixed upon the Lord.

We might think that we have consecrated everything to the Lord when in fact we have preserved much for ourselves. The more the Lord works on us, the more we will be purified. Once we realize that without the Lord we really have nothing, we begin to gain the testimony that we are coming up from the wilderness.

A healthy church should come up from the wilderness. The saints should realize that we are waiting for the Lord's return. Those with the Lord's return in view desire nothing of this world. If there are many in a certain church who are coming up from the wilderness, surely that entire church will come up from the wilderness. May the Lord bless us so that we may come up from the wilderness into His rest.

“LIKE PILLARS OF SMOKE”

If you come up from the wilderness, it will be manifest that you have become like pillars of smoke. What does this refer to? When the people of Israel came up from the wilderness, a pillar of cloud and of fire went before them. (This pillar appeared as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night.) This pillar led the people of Israel. The Lord's seeker in the Song of Songs has by this time experienced the Lord's working in many aspects. She has

dwelt in the Lord's love, and she has experienced the work of the cross. Therefore, she has become such a pillar.

Pillars of smoke allude to the power of the Spirit. The Lord will work on you until you become someone who is able to shepherd and lead others, someone who can enlighten and render help. When you become such a person, the church is able to move forward, for you are able to lead people through the wilderness just as the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire led Israel. Then when you speak for the Lord, others will be affected by the riches you have been constituted with, and you will be a blessing to the church.

If we want to become such a blessing, we should seek to be filled with the Spirit rather than becoming busy with work. We should allow the Lord's hand to break us. Then through the scars imparted, our spirit may be released so that we may supply life to others. One day we will find that neither our labor nor our work matter if we have not become pillars of smoke. May others be able to testify of us, "You have become like the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in our midst. Because of you, the church is able to go forward."

**“PERFUMED WITH MYRRH AND
FRANKINCENSE, WITH ALL THE FRAGRANT
POWDERS OF THE MERCHANT”**

Where does the impact of the pillars of smoke come from? It comes from being “perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant.” According to Watchman Nee, “merchant” is singular, so it refers to the Lord Jesus. The Lord as the Merchant is selling something to us. He is in effect saying, “If you want the blessings of this stage, you must pay a price.”

We are not required to pay a price to gain the experiences of the first stage. Even the experience of having the plaits of gold with studs of silver is something done for us that results in our own beautification. But in this second stage, the seeking one realizes that a price must be paid if she wants to follow the Lord. Her love

for Him will not leave her untouched any longer, for from this point onward He will touch every aspect of her living.

Here in the experience of the third stage, we begin to realize that the Lord is a Merchant. We can no longer expect that things will come cheaply. The Lord makes it clear that if you pay Him five cents, He will give you something worth five cents, and if you pay Him 100 dollars, He will give you something worth 100 dollars. If you give Him one year, He will give you something worth one year in return; if you give Him ten years, He will give you something worth ten years in return. How much blessing He gives you depends on the price you are willing to pay. Our relationship with the Lord is no longer one in which He draws us, and then we pursue Him, or in which He freely supplies us, and thus we enjoy Him. Now the Lord demands, “Can you pay the price? Can I touch you in your living?” Although you will suffer the exacting of a price, your payment of the price will result in your being perfumed with myrrh.

To be perfumed is to absorb a fragrance and then to spread its aroma. Perfuming takes time. If it were a matter of being roasted, it might take less time, but you would not be able to endure it. To be perfumed requires a long process. If you don’t want to pay the price to be perfumed and instead you run away from the perfuming process, you will only delay the Lord—He will gain you eventually. His intention is to gain each one of us fully until our entire being is perfumed with His death and resurrection.

You may think that the Spirit works in you freely, at no cost to you. However, at a certain point in your Christian life, when you say, “Lord, bless me,” He will answer, “I will bless you, but at a price.” (The blessing referred to here is not your initial salvation, for the Lord does save you freely. After receiving salvation, however, you must pay a price in order to grow in life and become mature before the Lord.) In this stage, the way you live is by paying a price before God. You may think that it doesn’t matter whether you watch TV or read a novel, but you may find that God will only perfume you through your not reading the novel or not watching TV. If you are willing to pay a price, God will make you fragrant.

How can we become fragrant before the saints? It is by being

perfumed with myrrh, frankincense, and all the fragrant powders of the merchant. Myrrh refers to the suffering and death of Christ, and frankincense refers to Christ's resurrection. When we experience Christ's death and resurrection, we will become fragrant with Christ's death and resurrection. His death and resurrection are fragrant. When we experience a variety of environments before the Lord while paying the price to experience Him in those environments, He as the Merchant will supply us with the precious spices of His death and resurrection, making us fragrant pillars of smoke in the church life.

From this point onward, if we want God to bless us, we need to pay the price. If we want God to bless our marriage, we need to pay the price. If we want God to bless our family, we need to pay the price. If we want God to bless our job or our spiritual work, we need to pay the price. We must pay a price to buy the fragrant spices from the Merchant. In this way we will manifest the aroma of Christ's death and resurrection; we will bear a fragrance. Only when we pay the price to be perfumed by the Lord can we really supply others.

We often consider that everything given by the Lord comes in the principle of grace. We need to realize that our maturity is obtained by being perfumed with all the fragrant powders of the Lord. In a sense, it is true that we do not deserve to acquire these elements, but unless we pay the price to buy them from the Lord, we cannot obtain maturity in this age. If we are unwilling to pay the price, we cannot be matured. When we pay the price, however, all the blessings in Christ become our reality. May the Lord have mercy upon us so we can pray, "Oh, Lord, grant that I may pay the necessary price. Grant that I could buy everything that You have for me."

"SOLOMON'S BED"

In 3:7, the observer also says, "There is Solomon's bed." The one who comes up from the wilderness becomes Solomon's bed, where Solomon can rest. The Lord, as the greater Solomon, enjoys and gains rest in His believers. Brothers and sisters, we should be

those in whom the Lord can rest. He should feel restful because of us. Because of her experiences in the first and second stages, the Lord's lover has experienced the Lord's love, the Lord Himself, the work of the Lord, the cross, and the church. Now she is willing to come up from the wilderness and pay the price. The Spirit has worked in her, and by means of the cross's work, life is able to flow from her. She has also become fragrant with the fragrances of Christ. At such a point the Lord can say, "Now in My seeking one I am restful."

"SIXTY MIGHTY MEN SURROUND IT"

The Lord is not alone as He rests, but He is surrounded by 60 mighty men (3:7). Sixty is a number that refers to man, who was created on the sixth day. Now the seeking one has the capacity to unite with others who have come up from the wilderness, who are also pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh, frankincense, and all of the fragrant powders. She not only loves the Lord together with these seekers, but she even unites with them as an army. The Lord can rest because of this army. At this stage, we live in the church life and coordinate with those who have also separated themselves from the world and given themselves to experience Christ.

The Lord will make the fallen ones His bed! There are 60 mighty men surrounding the bed. All of them wield the sword because of the night alarms. Before the Lord returns, who can deal with Satan's work and attack? Only those who come up from the wilderness. They have experienced death and resurrection, so nothing can touch them. Even in the midst of Satan's threatening, the Lord has rest through them.

Solomon could not sleep restfully without those mighty men surrounding his bed, because something could happen in the night. It is not enough to make the Lord restful, for we still need to be concerned about the church. Therefore, the Lord needs not only a bed, but also 60 mighty men who keep themselves awake at night and are watchful until the Lord returns. They know how to wield the sword and are experts at war. When Satan attacks, they know

how to respond. When something happens in the church life, they know what they should do. They know how to lead the church and how to help the brothers and sisters.

At this time the maiden manifests that she is in union with the Lord. The world to her is a wilderness. Nothing in it can touch her or capture her heart. She is purely for the Lord, and she lives by His mercy. She unites with the Lord inwardly so that nothing can draw her away or distract her. Only such a person can be empowered by the Spirit and realize the meaning of the myrrh, frankincense, and fragrant powders. With others she is able to coordinate and be built up. Because of her readiness together with others who are like-souled with her, the Lord is restful.

**THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST—
KING SOLOMON'S PALANQUIN**

“King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon” (3:9). Before the Lord returns, He first needs a bed where He can rest, and then He needs a palanquin, in which He can be carried where He wants to go. The bed is for the Lord’s rest in the night, whereas the palanquin is for His move in the day.

We may think that one day we should be carried by the Lord. However, those who love the Lord eventually will carry Him. If there is no one to carry the Lord on the earth, He cannot move. The move of the Lord is carried by those who love Him and are absolute for Him. We who love the Lord must be not only His bed, but also His palanquin for the sake of accomplishing His move on the earth.

“A PALANQUIN OF THE WOOD OF LEBANON”

Verse 9 tells us, “King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon.” The wood of Lebanon is cedar wood, which denotes Christ’s noble humanity. The Lord’s lover being made a palanquin of cedar indicates that she has been constituted with Christ’s noble humanity.

“ITS POSTS HE MADE OF SILVER”

In verse 10 we are told further, “Its posts he made of silver, its bottom, of gold; its seat, of purple; its midst was inlaid with love from the daughters of Jerusalem.” The posts of the palanquin are made of silver, which means that the supporting element in the seeker for this move is the redemption of Christ. Due to Christ’s redemption the seeker’s speaking is different, her behavior is different, her thought is different, and her living is different. Originally she cared very much for herself, but now she receives the work of the cross in order to deal with her flesh. Originally she sought the Lord’s comfort when she was sad, and if the Lord didn’t show her any sympathy, she shed more tears. Now her weeping is mingled with praises for the work of the Lord on His cross. She says amen to the Lord’s dealing, because she is made of silver. In this regard, her feelings match those of the Lord.

In order to be the Lord’s palanquin, we need to experience the Lord’s redemption, represented by the silver. Without the silver, there is no palanquin. If our thoughts are filled with low things, then we cannot be the Lord’s palanquin. If we are lazy, we cannot be the Lord’s palanquin. If we have an uncontrollable temper, we cannot be the palanquin. Our thoughts, our will, and our character need to experience being redeemed. When we truly experience the Lord’s redemption, we will be able to bear Christ to others.

“ITS BOTTOM, OF GOLD”

The bottom of the palanquin is made of gold, meaning that the source of the Lord’s move is out from God. Brothers and sisters, we have to remember that if God is not the foundation, our work is useless, regardless of what method we employ. God will not commit His move to those who are not drawing from His life. We need to pay a price before God. Our personality, temper, habit, and thought should bear the mark of the cross, and we must be those living out God’s divine life as the base of our work. If we have experienced silver, we will also have gold. The redemption of Christ enables us to

experience God's life and nature, and the more we possess of God's life and nature, the more the palanquin is equipped for the Lord's move.

“ITS SEAT, OF PURPLE”

The palanquin's seat is of purple, which speaks of nobility and kingship. We will manifest kingship to the degree that we experience God's redemption and receive God's divine nature.

**“ITS MIDST WAS INLAID WITH LOVE
FROM THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM”**

The Lord's palanquin is inlaid with love from the daughters of Jerusalem. Originally, all the virgins loved only the Lord. When you become a palanquin, all the virgins will also love you. Have you noticed that when your love to the Lord is stale, the saints seem to love you less? The more you love the Lord, the more the Lord's lovers will also find you lovable.

KING SOLOMON'S GLADNESS

At this time, there is an espousal between the Shulammitte and Solomon! Even though she is not yet fully matured, she engages herself to Solomon to be his bride. Those observing say, “Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, yes, on the day of the gladness of his heart.” The writer here did not say “daughters of Jerusalem,” but “daughters of Zion.” Zion is the highest point in Jerusalem, and it denotes the overcomers in the church life.

“Espousals” in this verse can be translated “engagement.” Before you are engaged, you can still date or choose someone else. However, once you are engaged, you must hold to your commitment. Someone's love for a boyfriend or girlfriend cannot be depended upon. In a sense, before this engagement, we could have left the Lord for other things. But no longer.

Here all the overcomers go forth to look at King Solomon with the crown. What is the crown with which Solomon's mother crowned him on the day of his espousals? This crown refers to the Shulammitte herself. Whoever loves the Lord will be His crown. Those who are engaged to the Lord are His boast, and they become His crown.

The daughters of Zion—the overcomers in the church—are those who help us to become the Lord's crown. Those who are stronger take care of us and support us so that we may become such a crown to the Lord. On the day of the Lord's espousals, those exercised ones who love Christ will crown the Lord. The crown will comprise those whom they have helped to follow the Lord and to commit themselves to Him in love.

“OH, YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL, MY LOVE!”

In verses 1-5 of chapter 4, the king praises, “Oh, you are beautiful, my love!” Seven items in particular give rise to the king's praise in this section.

“YOUR EYES ARE LIKE DOVES BEHIND YOUR VEIL”

First, the Lord declares, “Your eyes are like doves behind your veil” (4:1). A veil is something that covers and obscures. Being behind a veil means that she is hidden in the Lord and does not allow others to see what she has in herself. To the Lord, her eyes are beautiful because they are behind a veil. And she is as single as a dove as she looks at the Lord.

From chapter 1 we realize that the eyes of a normal Christian should be like doves (1:15). Now the seeking one has progressed, for her eyes are behind the veil, meaning that she does not open what she sees to others. She does not try to show others her spiritual insight and discernment. Her eyes are not only like doves but also behind a veil. If we are experienced, we will veil our spiritual insight in the church life. The Lord likes our living before Him to be hidden from men, and He desires our eyes to see nothing but Him.

**“YOUR HAIR IS LIKE A FLOCK OF GOATS
THAT REPOSE ON MOUNT GILEAD”**

Second, the Lord praises her hair, saying, “Your hair is like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead.” Hair refers to power, as illustrated with Samson. Hair also signifies consecration and obedience. Here the flock of goats that pastures on Mount Gilead speaks of her satisfaction with the Lord as her pasture. It also indicates that she is willing to give herself to the Lord. She is fully in submission to the Lord, just like a Nazarite (see Numbers 6).

Even when we have eyes like doves, we still need hair that is like a flock of goats. Besides being pure and single, we also need to be obedient and powerful. True power comes not from our own exercise of will, but from obedience to the Lord’s will. The Shulammitte is no longer wandering about or trying to do something separate from the Lord’s will. She is now a consecrated person, empowered by the Lord.

When we have grown in the Lord, He will grant us power so that our speaking and exercise can meet the church’s needs. If we are truly submitting to the Lord, we will receive something from the Lord with which to supply others. Before men we will have power, but inwardly we will experience resting and feeding upon Christ on Mount Gilead.

Power, however, should not be our focus; we should focus instead on obedience. Our concern should be to obey, not to become powerful. We must care more about living before God and obeying Him than we do about manifesting power. If we have a burden and the ability to carry something out, we should not be eager for that. If we are eloquent and persuasive, we should not feel that we must speak. Instead, we should repose before God and function according to His leading.

“YOUR TEETH ARE LIKE A FLOCK OF SHORN EWES”

Third, the Lord praises her teeth, saying, “Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of

which have borne twins, and none of them is bereaved of her young.” Sheep’s wool refers to a fleshly life. The cloth of the priest is made of white linen, not wool, because wool is related to sin. Being shorn means that her flesh has been taken out of the way and dealt with.

Furthermore, she has a whole “flock” of teeth. Teeth refer to one’s ability to receive, because they convey the thought of chewing on food. The Lord’s seeker has a flock of teeth, so her ability to receive something is notable. She knows how to enjoy eating and fully receive food. This shows we should be able to receive help from any believer, even a newly saved one. Anything that is fresh in life and in the Spirit should become our food. The matured saints are those whose teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes. In other words, their enjoyment before the Lord and in the church life is pure and thorough.

We shouldn’t be selective in receiving life and truth. If we are selective, our teeth are not like a flock of shorn ewes. Instead of coming up clean from the washing, we bring something impure into our spiritual pursuit. The maiden here can now receive and gain help from the Lord in every situation. She is not selective. Her flesh has been taken out of the way, and she is able to receive feeding from whatever means the Lord chooses. Moreover, her ability of chewing and receiving is uniform, as indicated by the phrase “all of which have borne twins, and none of them is bereaved of her young.” She has such a good receiving and chewing ability.

**“YOUR LIPS ARE LIKE A SCARLET THREAD,
AND YOUR MOUTH IS LOVELY”**

Fourth, the Lord praises her lips, saying, “Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely.” The scarlet thread signifies redemption. Her speaking for the Lord is through redemption, but not in a careless way. The thread of scarlet also signifies authority. This indicates that her speaking for the Lord is not only through redemption but also with authority. That her mouth is lovely

means that her words are with grace (Col. 4:6). Our words should water others. Furthermore, her words are filtered through the Lord's dealing. They are not opinion or gossip. Her words are able to meet the need of various listeners on differing occasions. Bringing life and nourishment, her words are sweet and refreshing.

In the church life, all our coordination comes in the form of words. If your words are not through redemption, you can't coordinate sweetly with others. If we come together and our words turn to gossip, it is not possible to have any genuine coordination. Only when we have a proper speaking can the church be built up.

**“YOUR CHEEKS ARE LIKE A PIECE OF
POMEGRANATE BEHIND YOUR VEIL”**

The fifth thing king Solomon praises about the Shulammitte is her cheeks, when he says, “Your cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate behind your veil” (4:3). Originally, her cheeks were beautiful with plaits of ornaments (1:10). Now her cheeks are beautiful behind her veil. In the past, she tried to appear beautiful. Now her beauty is behind her veil, indicating that it is not for others to see.

Her cheeks are also like a piece of pomegranate. It is not a whole pomegranate, but a broken piece of one, full of seeds. Anyone who has eaten a pomegranate realizes that it is entirely full of seeds. This tells us that, at this stage, the seeker is full of the abundance of life. Her beauty comes from her being rich in life, yet it is something behind a veil. Her beauty is for God to appreciate, not men. Her beauty lies in her being rich in life supply.

**“YOUR NECK IS LIKE THE TOWER OF DAVID
BUILT FOR AN ARMORY”**

The sixth item the Lord praises is her neck, saying, “Your neck is like the tower of David built for an armory: a thousand bucklers hang on it, all the shields of the mighty men.” In the Bible, the neck refers to man's will. In chapter 1, the Lord said, “Your neck is beautiful with strings of jewels” (1:10). Now He says, “Your neck

is like the tower of David built for an armory.” Being like the tower, she is not bent over with eyes cast upon the earth as one bound by Satan. Her will has been so strengthened that she is no longer enslaved to the world or affected by Satan.

The Lord’s praise for the Shulammitte’s neck indicates that she is submissive to His authority. The beauty of her neck indicates the submission of her will. As a tower, she does not face earth but heaven. However, she is not stiff-necked. She submits to Christ as the King and cooperates with the Lord’s will. David as the king built a tower for the Lord. It was for God’s interest. The maiden’s being as a tower that stood before God proves that she is not stiff-necked but obedient.

Furthermore, the tower of her neck is also an armory. She exercises her will to prepare for the spiritual warfare. Verse 4 tells us, “A thousand bucklers hang on it, all the shields of the mighty men.” This refers to her preparedness against Satan’s attack. Brothers and sisters, Satan will not usually attack us by means of sin, for we are sensitive concerning sin. Satan tries to get us to leave our proper standing under the Lord’s authority, for then he can surely defeat us. Therefore, the first thing Satan attacks is our neck. No matter whether it is through sin, the evil world, or the “good” world, Satan succeeds if we leave our place of submission under the Lord’s authority.

The mention of 1,000 bucklers within the tower indicates that whenever there is a flaming dart from Satan, we are able to quench it, regardless from what direction it comes. Whether Satan’s attack comes through our emotion, our will, or our mind, we will know how to make our defense and remain under God’s authority. Even should Satan attack us at our area of greatest weakness, we will be able to maintain our defense, for we have experienced the work of God and have stored up sufficient bucklers.

Our obedience will bring us the needed bucklers. Sometimes when we have the sense of the Lord’s presence in our prayers, we feel quite victorious; we think that in this way we can defend against the devil. Actually, such an experience only provides a little protection. In reality, the more we obey the Lord, the more bucklers we

have. We should place the emphasis on our obedience rather than on our bucklers. It is through our obedience that we come to possess 1,000 bucklers of mighty men. If this is our experience, we can stand before God as His mighty men.

**“YOUR TWO BREASTS ARE LIKE TWO FAWNS,
TWINNS OF A GAZELLE, THAT FEED AMONG THE LILIES”**

Finally, in verse 5 the Lord says, “Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies.” This is the seventh and last item of the Lord’s praise. Originally she said, “My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh that lies at night between my breasts” (1:13). Now the Lord says, “Your breasts are like two fawns.” Fawns are shy and timid. They are easily frightened, and they are sensitive in their feelings. Here, she is full of the sense of life. She also carefully preserves her holy sentiments toward the Lord, cherishing them up in her heart.

“Breasts” refers to your faith and love. What are the breasts? They are twins of a gazelle, indicating a harmony that issues from having the same life. Love and faith are related to life. The richer the experience of life, the stronger the faith. The richer the life, the greater the love. If you are a person full of life, you are a person full of faith and love. The more you grow in life, the more you are able to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. And with this love, you have faith toward the Lord. You are very clear that when you are with the Lord, everything will be fine. The Lord is the One on whom you depend. Your life should manifest a faith and love that are in proportion to each other according to the life you have received.

The seven items of the Lord’s praise—her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, and breasts—indicate the experiences we should have when we follow the Lord in a healthy way. We should examine ourselves in light of these seven items.

**THE DEEPER PURSUIT—GOING TO THE MOUNTAIN
OF MYRRH AND THE HILL OF FRANKINCENSE**

At this time the maiden experiences a full union with the Lord. She is the Lord's satisfaction, and her beauty wins His praise. She is no longer satisfied with her own experiences or focused only upon her own fellowship with the Lord. Because she has experienced the work of the cross, she is able to receive the Lord's praise without getting excited or proud. She knows that her earlier experience, "My beloved is mine and I am His," was sweet, and the banqueting house was very rich. However, she also realizes that apart from the experiences of myrrh and frankincense, she cannot be matured.

After the Lord praises her, she has a hunger deep within, so she says, "Until the day dawns and the shadows flee away, I, for my part, will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (4:6). She realizes that she is not yet perfected. She desires to go on in her experience, so she is willing to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. In other words, she is willing to walk the way of the cross, so that by it she may have a deeper union with the Lord.

Now she has a feeling that as one the Lord has praised, and as one manifested in the church, she needs to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense to dwell there. She longs that the myrrh, the death of Christ, would perfume her, so that she could express His resurrection, represented by the frankincense. Although she was not always obedient when the cross was working on her, she eventually became full of the riches of life. Now, she is willing to rise up and walk with the Lord.

She has come to the realization that only by means of fellowship in the Lord's death and resurrection can she go through all the difficulties, and only by means of the work of the cross can she become God's satisfaction. Not until then will she be a testimony in the church and a lover before the Lord. She realizes that her relationship with the Lord no longer relies primarily upon reading the Bible, going to some meetings, or just praying some sweet prayers.

Now she sees that she needs to pay a price in order to continue on in her love relationship with the Lord. It is because of this that she wants to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.

Our chief desire should be to experience the Lord in His death and resurrection. May we all pray, “Lord, I too want to go to the mountain of myrrh. I don’t want to treasure my gift. The blessings I held before are now forsaken. I desire to go to the mountain of myrrh.” Only those who abide in the mountain of myrrh will truly experience the riches of God and express Christ’s resurrection life, as represented by the hill of frankincense.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE STREAMS

“You are altogether beautiful, my love, and there is no blemish in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; with me from Lebanon come. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the leopards’ mountains. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one strand of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments than all spices! Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choicest fruit; henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. A fountain in gardens, a well of living water, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O

north wind; and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden: let its spices flow forth; let my beloved come into his garden and eat his choicest fruit.” (Song of Songs 4:7-16)

INTRODUCTION

In the second chapter of the Song of Songs, the Lord requested of His seeking one, “In the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the precipice, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice” (2:14). The Lord will not let us go until we have fulfilled this expectation. It is this goal—that we remain in the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice—that determines how He leads and deals with us.

The first of His dealings with us as He leads us towards this goal is to take away the sense of His presence. As we are enjoying being in the King’s chambers (1:4), He takes away the feeling of the sweetness of His presence. In this way He teaches us that His inner dwelling has nothing to do with our feelings. The Shulammité’s experience was, “On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not” (3:1). In our experience we lose the sensation of the Lord’s presence.

In the second step, we are prompted in our distress to open up our situation to the other brothers and sisters. This is portrayed by the Shulammité’s saying, “I will rise now and go about in the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek him whom my soul loves” (3:2). After this, He leads us to the experienced brothers and sisters, who are like “the watchmen who go about in the city” (3:3). These experienced saints help us to become more established and constituted before the Lord.

Eventually we learn that His presence with us is real and dependable, whether we sense it or not. Even though we know this, we still do our best to hold onto His presence when we experience it (3:4). In this way we are step-by-step, consistently, and gradually being transformed. By means of the Lord’s working, we are growing in life. Others also realize that we have experienced the consti-

tuting work of the Lord, so they ask, “Who is she who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?” (3:6).

Now His seeker has become His rest, constituted with His element and coordinated with others who know how to fight for the Lord’s interest (represented by the 60 mighty men who surround the king’s bed in the night). She has also become His vehicle for His move (represented by Solomon’s palanquin). In her, the Lord has someone through whom He can act and carry out His desire among men. Those who have become the Lord’s bed and palanquin have lost their opinion and even their feeling about what should be. Instead, those who bear the Lord are constructed with “posts of silver” (3:10), meaning that their mind, emotion, and will have experienced the effect of redemption.

The Lord’s palanquin today consists of those who have experienced God’s inward working. Because of their constitution and stand, they are appreciated by the Lord and the saints. The saints appreciate the outward effect and manifestation of the Lord’s work upon them, while the Lord appreciates the inward working of His life which has borne seven kinds of fruit. First, her eyes have become like doves behind her veil. Second, her hair is now like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead. Third, her teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes. Fourth, her lips are like a scarlet thread. Fifth, her cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate behind her veil. Sixth, her neck is like the tower of David. And seventh, her two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies. (The significance of these items of the Lord’s praise was covered in the previous message.) The lover of the Lord in the Song of Songs bears this testimony.

When you pay the price before the Lord, there will be a beautiful, sevenfold result. We should desire this experience, for whoever has these seven items is healthy before the Lord. Such ones are worthy to be His bride. When we have reached this stage, the Lord is blessed in us and glorified through us.

As we read the Song of Songs, we find that a lover of God has a seeking heart. We should always feel that we are not perfected

yet. Even though we may have loved the Lord for many years, we should still realize that we are lacking in the experience of life. We should feel that we still need a lot of the work of the Spirit. We should not be satisfied until we have reached this wonderful manifestation that the Lord desires.

The Lord praises His seeker's sight, her submissiveness, her receiving ability, her ability to generate life, her ability to speak for Him, her exercise to carry out His will, and her sensitivity to life. The Lord can tell her, "You have really satisfied My heart." In spite of all this, however, she still has not fully reached the place the Lord requested of her in chapter 2, verse 14.

She has discovered how sweet it is to live a life of love with the Lord in chapter 1. In chapter 2, she has also come to treasure the banqueting house, the church. As one who desires to be a blessing to the church, she realizes she has to live in "the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense" (4:6) in order to be perfumed with death (myrrh) and resurrection (frankincense) as a pillar of smoke (3:6). Only through death, resurrection, and the work of the cross can she really satisfy God, testify in the church, and become a real lover of the Lord. She knows that her love relation with the Lord does not merely lead her to read the Bible, go to meetings, or just say, "I love you, Lord." This love relationship comes with a price. Therefore, she has to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. Thus far, she realizes that her experience of the cross has not been the result of her own obedience. Now, however, she begins to respond to the Lord's call in chapter 2 to "rise up and come away." Therefore she begins to pay the price and becomes one who is losing yet gaining, "as poor yet enriching many" (2 Cor. 6:10). The Lord now can tell her, "You are beautiful. You satisfy My heart. You are no longer a mare; now you are My beauty" (see Song of Songs 4:7).

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF ASCENSION

Called into His Ascension

If we are willing to stay in the mountain of myrrh to experience the Lord's death and in the hill of frankincense to experience His resurrection, He will call us to be with Him in His ascension.

Being Altogether Beautiful, without Blemish

First of all, the Lord tells her, "You are altogether beautiful, my love, and there is no blemish in you" (4:7).

Being "My Bride"

In verse 8 the Lord says, "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; with me from Lebanon come. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the leopards' mountains." Here for the first time, the Lord calls her "My bride."

Moving with the Lord on the Ground of Ascension

The Lord requests of her, "Come with me." This indicates that the Lord has a calling. His intention is to call us upward to move with Him in His ascension.

***1. From Lebanon—to Look at the
Things on the Earth from the Ground of Ascension***

The land of Lebanon refers to the Lord's resurrection and ascension. The Lord calls her to move with Him in the realm of ascension. The Lord tells her, "You have to be in the transcendence of My ascension. You need to look at things from ascension. Do not remain in your own pursuing, your own little work, and your plans for the future. You have to be with Me in the realm where I

am, in the heavens, to consider the things of the Spirit, to co-labor with Me, and to accomplish My desire.”

2. From the Top of Amana—to Look at the Things on the Earth with the View of Truth

The Lord calls His seeker to go with Him not only from Lebanon, but also from the top of Amana. Amana’s peak symbolizes the reality of the truth. The Lord is telling her, “Do not just preach according to your own feeling as you did before. You have to see what is real according to the truth. The truth must not just be the words in your mouth; it must become your reality.”

3. From the Top of Senir—to Look at Things with the View of Spiritual Warfare in the Church

The Lord is also with her on the top of Senir. “Senir” means armor, referring to the church, which puts on the whole armor of God in Ephesians chapter 6. In other words, you need not only to be in the heavenly places and in the reality of the spiritual things; you also need to put on the church. The armor is for the spiritual warfare. The real warfare can be successful only when you are with Christ on the ground of ascension and in the church.

4. From the Top of Hermon—to View Things on the Earth with the Power of Christ’s Victory

We also are called to proceed with the Lord from the top of Hermon, which refers to destruction. Christ has overcome the power of sin and destroyed the enemy’s power through His cross (Heb. 2:14). We have to wield the overcoming power of the Lord’s cross to destroy the enemy. We are expected to go with Him from “the lions’ dens” and “the leopards’ mountains.” Peter described the devil as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). A lion is good at roaring, and a leopard is good at clawing, ripping, and destroying. In Ephesians, Paul tells us that our battle is with an enemy who occupies heav-

only places (6:12). Walking on the mountaintops and looking down from there inevitably bring us into an encounter with the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains. When Christ calls us to walk with Him in His ascension, we should not expect that everything will be easy for us. On the contrary, the lions and leopards will be closer than ever before. We will even have to learn to fight the enemy face to face.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ASCENSION

As those who stand with the Lord in His ascension, we will confront the following two situations:

First, we will be involved in spiritual warfare. You have to know that when you are on ascension's ground, you are also close to where the enemy dwells. All of Satan's stratagems start from the high places. You, however, are not just holding up the shield of faith to defend against the flaming darts of his stratagems; instead, you are taking the battle directly to Satan and his army. You will be able to see what Satan is preparing to do, and you will be able to deal with it accordingly. Thus, you will be able to take the initiative to frustrate his attack. When you are with Christ in His ascension, you are no longer awaiting Satan's attack from the vantage point of earth. Instead, you see his plans and can preempt him.

Second, you will possess the Lord's heavenly vantage point, for you are together with the Lord proceeding from "Lebanon." We are never alone when we are in the Lord's ascension. He never leaves us to fight the spiritual warfare on our own. When we enter into ascension with the Lord, the Lord is with us to experience the reality of all the spiritual things. He is with us from Lebanon, from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, and from the lions' dens and leopards' mountains. We will have the same mind as the Lord, and we will be in one accord with Him for the carrying out of God's eternal desire through His work on the earth.

As the Lord calls us forward to be with Him in His ascension, He emphasizes four things.

First of all, we should realize our position. Where are you? In

Lebanon. You are on ascension's ground. You don't need to ask for victory; you are on the ground of victory. You don't need to ask for strength; you are on the ground of strength. You don't need to ask for light; you are in light. Why? You are with the Lord in the heavenly places. According to our position and status, we are the people of heaven, though we still walk on the earth. May the Lord open our eyes to see that our position is in the heavenlies.

Second, those who are with the Lord in His ascension can abide in the reality of the truth. What you speak and what you live should no longer be separate. What you say has to be your reality. You need to pay the price for the truth to become your reality. You don't just buy some myrrh, but you dwell in the mountain of myrrh. The Lord will sell the mountain of myrrh to you. You need to pay the price to experience the reality of truth. If you really desire to go to the mountain of myrrh, you have to be willing to cast everything else away. Do not be anxious. Do not worry. Do not plan. Do not think too much. Your life is in the Lord's hand. You live by faith before the Lord. What you hear and what you speak of the truth has to become your reality.

Third, the Lord reveals that we need to put on the armor, which is the church. We have to know that we are not by ourselves anymore. It doesn't matter how spiritual or how effective we are. Now we must live in the church life and allow the Body to be our protection. It doesn't matter whether the church is strong or weak. The church is our armor to fight against Satan.

Fourth, the Lord shows us that we are living in the victory of the cross. We must be in continual union with the Lord to experience all the riches of the cross.

When we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, telling Him, "I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense," He will surely be moved to reveal these things to us: that we live in the heavenly places; that the truth can become our reality; that we must put on the church to have a life of spiritual warfare; and that we live in the victory of the cross. Here the Lord is saying, "If you are willing to live in the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense, you need to experience the reality of ascension. You have to

live a life of ascension and experience the transcendence of ascension. The truth, the church, and the victory of the cross can then be substantiated in you.”

THE LORD’S PRAISE OF HIS BELOVED

1. She Has Ravished the Heart of the Lord with Her Obedience

Chapter 4, verse 9, says, “You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one strand of your necklace.” The Shulammitte answers the Lord’s calling first with one glance of her eyes, and second with one strand of her necklace. She doesn’t argue with the Lord or bargain with Him anymore. She answers with her eyes, ravishing His heart with her glance. The best way to know whether someone is in one accord with you is by the glance of his or her eyes. This is often true between a husband and wife.

The Shulammitte’s obedience comes naturally. She just looks at the Lord. Her glance seems to tell Him, “Lord, I am with You. I respond to all Your requests. Your wish is my command. Look, I am here. I don’t want to hurt You or hinder You anymore. I don’t want to have any disagreement with You. I am willing to put aside all I have that Your desire might be fulfilled.” The Lord is deeply moved. He says, “You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride.” The Lord’s heart is excited because she answers His call to enter into His ascension. When the Lord asks her to go with Him, surprisingly she obeys!

She also has one strand of necklace, revealing that her will is given over to the Lord. A necklace is a chain upon the neck, signifying the will. Therefore a necklace here is a symbol of submission. She has but one strand occupying her neck, which is the request of the Lord. The Lord has asked of her a certain matter, and this demand has become her necklace. She obeys the Lord completely. Such a response ravishes the Lord’s heart. Previously, the Shulammitte made a great show of pursuing the Lord, yet the Lord

compared her to a mare. Here she doesn't say a thing, yet the Lord says she has ravished His heart. In 4:6 she says, "I, for my part, will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." Then the Lord asks her to come with Him. She doesn't say anything, but answers with one glance of her eyes. Her reply is manifested with the one strand of chain upon her neck. This necklace indicates that she cares for what the Lord cares for. The Lord is really touched by this. Her eyes tell Him that she is deeply joined with Him.

May the Lord have mercy so that we may be the ones who ravish His heart. Although we know a lot and may have a strong desire, nothing is real until we ravish the heart of the Lord. We have to satisfy the Lord in everything and ravish His heart in every matter. You have to take the real action. Whenever the Lord has a demand, we should be able to answer, "Lord, I am here. I am right here." On your neck is but one strand of necklace whenever the Lord asks something of you.

2. "How Much Better Is Your Love than Wine"

The Lord praises her, "How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments than all spices!" (4:10). When she is so submissive, the Lord doesn't say that her submission is beautiful, but that her love is beautiful. Brothers and sisters, would your labor make the Lord say, "How beautiful is your love"? Or do you still expect the Lord to praise the effectiveness of your labor? The Lord, however, won't praise your labor's effectiveness. Instead, He desires to say, "How beautiful is your *love*, my sister, my bride!" In chapter 1, the Shulammitte told the Lord, "Your love is better than wine." Here it is the Lord telling her, "How beautiful is *your* love."

A good meeting is an enjoyment to the Lord. A good work is also an enjoyment to the Lord. However, these are not the Lord's desire. The Lord wants us to be sanctified and overcoming, but neither of these are His primary desire. What He truly desires is our unceasing love toward Him. No matter how blessed we are, no

matter how approved we are, no matter how many experiences we have, we still need to tell the Lord, “Oh Lord, I love You. I love You in all my labor. I serve You because I love You. Why do I go the meetings? It is because I love You.” Are we the ones who prompt the Lord to exclaim, “How beautiful is your love!” For example, there may be a good meeting after which everyone is excited, saying, “How rich was the presence of the Lord! Every testimony was so prevailing!” The Lord’s response would be, “This is because of My love, which you admit is better than good wine. But what about your love?” What the Lord treasures is our love.

I do hope this word would stay with you for the rest of your life. You may work much, labor much, and serve much in the coming years. But in those coming years, will you still be able to tell the Lord, “Your love is better than wine”? Indeed you may produce much for Him, but it is not the “wine” you produce but your love toward Him that really can satisfy Him. Love is the banner between the Lord and you. Love is the banner the Lord stretches out over your life—“His banner over me is love” (2:4). You cannot replace this banner with other things in your life. No matter how hard you work, no matter how desperately you labor, no matter how much price you pay, the Lord will say it is useless unless He has your love.

3. “How Much Better Is...the Fragrance of Your Ointments than All Spices”

The Lord also praises her, “How much better is...the fragrance of your ointments than all spices!” In the beginning of the book it is said that the king’s anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance (1:3). That shows the Lord Himself has a pleasant fragrance. Here the Lord praises the Shulammitte, telling her that the fragrance of her ointments is much better than all spices. No longer is the Lord the only one who has a pleasant fragrance; now we also are full of fragrance. Not only the Lord has the Holy Spirit, but we also possess the Holy Spirit. The ointment upon the head of “Aaron” (representing Christ in Psalm 133) also comes to us, His Body. Since

the Lord as the compound Spirit has worked in us, we have a pleasant fragrance. The life flowing from us can supply and satisfy people wherever we go..

4. “Your Lips Drip Fresh Honey...and the Fragrance of Your Garments Is Like the Fragrance of Lebanon”

The Lord continues, “Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon” (4:11). Our lips, which represent our words and our speaking, drip honey. Honey is one of the richest and most enlivening of all foods. What we say becomes full of the reviving power of life. When we speak for the Lord with honey, our words are full of life. They drop slowly as the honeycomb. We are so rich that we are not in a hurry to pour out what we have; our words drop slowly as honey from the honeycomb. As such persons, we can release what the Lord has committed to us wherever we are.

“Honey and milk are under your tongue.” Honey revives people, and milk nourishes people. Honey gives us strength when we are tired. Milk feeds us when we are hungry. The tired are revived and the hungry are fed through our words. When people, young or old, weak or strong, come upon us, they will gain the riches of life.

When we answer the Lord’s calling, we are in Lebanon—the realm of ascension; we are on the top of Amana—the reality of truth; we are on the top of Senir—the whole armor; and we are on the top of Hermon, in the lions’ den and the leopards’ mountain—we are able to discern the stratagems of Satan. When we are in the realm of ascension and then come to people, we will be full of life and full of supply so that we can revive others. “O may my lips drip fresh honey, and may you enjoy the sweetness of my love!” (hymn 303, Chinese Supplement).

As one who loves the Lord and has a rich life flow, you give the Lord enjoyment, for He has gained someone who belongs to Him completely. “The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.” Garments indicate a person’s behavior. Now

your behavior is completely in resurrection. Although you live a normal life outwardly, you live a separated life and bear a heavenly fragrance.

**5. “A Garden Enclosed Is My Sister, My Bride,
a Spring Shut Up, a Fountain Sealed”**

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (4:12). In the Bible, God’s first thought was that of a garden—the so-called Garden of Eden. When He created man, He planted a garden and put the man there to take care of it. There man could enjoy the milk and honey. Alas! Adam and Eve failed and damaged God’s purpose. But praise the Lord! In the one who stands in Christ’s ascension, man recovers what was lost, and God can testify, “How wonderful! I now have another Garden of Eden. My sister, my bride is like an enclosed garden.”

There were only God and man in the Garden of Eden. In like manner, there are only God and man in you. To the Lord you are a garden that is fragrant, fresh, and full of life. The Lord can tell you, “When I come to you, when I look at you, and when I fellowship with you, I feel that My purpose for creating man is achieved. Indeed I have gained My garden.”

Your experience here is higher than that revealed in the beginning of chapter 4, where you are united with the Lord, but still free. Now as a garden you have no responsibility but to grow something for others’ enjoyment. As a garden, you have no opinion what should be planted or where and when it should be planted. The Lord is the Master. He will decide when to enjoy your portion. Our Lord is so great that He has many lovers, whom He enjoys one by one.

You are also “a spring shut up.” This means that you are always bubbling with the enjoyment of life before the Lord. You are “a fountain sealed.” Not only are you beautiful, enjoyable, fresh, and new; you are also full of life. The Lord looks at you and finds that you have so many “rods” and “shoots.” There are so many things sprouting up from you. The Lord finds in you a recovered paradise!

6. “Your Shoots Are an Orchard of Pomegranates”

How is it that the Lord’s paradise can be recovered? The secret is the pomegranate. The pomegranate tree is full of life. If you break open its fruit, you will see that it is full of seeds and juice. Rods and shoots indicate the abundance of life.

The verses tell us this garden is filled with choicest fruit (4:13-14). There is henna with spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. All of these are produced from the seeker’s experience of the mountain of myrrh and the fragrant powders of the merchant.

The Lord seems to tell her, “Death has had its operation in you, and now, through your union with Me, you are full of supply.” As Paul testified, “So then death operates in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:12). Brothers and sisters, when you read this book, you will find that the Lord doesn’t care for much other than love and the cross. If you love the Lord, you must take up the cross, and the more you take up the cross, the more you will love the Lord. The Lord always confronts you with these two matters. He is not interested in your work nor in your spirituality. This is totally a matter of life. You will grow in life spontaneously through love and the cross.

7. “Streams from Lebanon”

The Lord continues to testify in verse 15 that His beloved is “a fountain in gardens, a well of living water, and streams from Lebanon.” She is full of the life supply. She is a fountain in gardens, a well of living water. She is not only helped by others, but she also co-labors with them. Since she stands submissively in the heavenly state, she becomes a life supply even to those who are experienced, with gardens and fountains. She is so rich that she can meet the need of everyone. The church testifies that she is a person of the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, you have to know the spiritual principle that we gain life by experiencing death. We have to go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense until the day dawns and

the shadows flee away, that is, until the Lord comes back and we are raptured. The Lord is saying, "If you are willing to give yourself to Me and to allow Me to decrease you, polish you, and form you to My image, I will take you to Lebanon, to the top of Amana, and to the top of Senir and Hermon." At this time, we already have come to know the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice. Now our experience is that of an enlargement of the victory of the cross. It is no wonder that the Lord's heart is drawn to us.

Because we are one with the Lord for His purpose, we become those who are in His heart. His heart is upon us. As a result, we become a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed just for the Lord's enjoyment. We have become full of the Lord's riches, which are like honey and milk flowing from us to revive and nourish those around us. We are joined to the Lord for His desire. We are just for Him. Although we may be carrying many things practically, in our hearts we just desire and treasure and hope in the Lord, the lovely and beautiful One. What a wonderful experience! Therefore the Lord can say of her that she is "a fountain in gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." She is indeed the source of supply to others. Others are growing in the garden, but she is a fountain in gardens. Others have wells, but hers is a well of living water.

**"AWAKE, O NORTH WIND; AND COME,
O SOUTH WIND! BLOW UPON MY GARDEN:
LET ITS SPICES FLOW FORTH"**

Now the Lord's beloved is at the height of joy. She says, "Awake, O north wind; and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden: let its spices flow forth; let my beloved come into his garden and eat his choicest fruit" (4:16). She knows that the Lord enjoys her and treasures her, and she knows that the riches of life in her have become a supply and refreshment to others.

However, she also knows that she needs three things:

First, she realizes she needs the north wind and the south wind. She knows, "When I am in such a marvelous condition, I have to go

forward. For my going on, the Lord has to work on me more. O Lord, use every opportunity to work in me. Let the north wind (which is cold, bitter, and insufferable), and the south wind (which is warm, gentle, and comforting) come together.” How bold and buoyant she is! She is so joyful that she has become the blessing of the church and the enjoyment of the Lord, yet she asks for all kinds of environments. She doesn’t want to live a common life. She desires a life full of all kinds of new experiences. Although she doesn’t understand what she is asking for, her yearning still pleases the Lord.

Second, she realizes that her experience and constitution have made her precious. She has produced all kinds of choicest fruit and spices, and she has received so many blessings. She is not common before the Lord anymore. She has paid a high price and shed many tears. She has also experienced a lot of enjoyment. She can testify of her story with the Lord over the years, how she helped the church at this time and blessed others at that time. She has many experiences to back her up. When she looks back over her life, she can say, “Lord, I am not common anymore. I am special. I have all kinds of fragrances and choice fruit. The fragrances are for You to smell, and the fruit is for You to taste. All that I have and all that I have become are for Your satisfaction.”

This leads us to the third thing she realizes: she recognizes that her garden is the Lord’s. First she says, “Blow upon my garden.” Then she says, “Let my beloved come into his garden.” She knows that she belongs to the Lord and the Lord belongs to her. Her experience is that of being in union with the Lord. Her assurance is not merely that of her salvation being eternally secure, nor of being a child of God. She realizes that she exists for the Lord’s satisfaction. Her concern is now, “Lord, do You feel sweet when I come to You? Do You enjoy my prayer and my reflection? Do You feel that we are fully joined in spirit when I speak for You? Do you feel that we are one when I go visiting and testifying for You?” She is united with the Lord to the extent that her garden indeed is the Lord’s garden. What a beautiful and glorious manifestation of life she has! We praise the Lord for this kind of living that we can experience with our Lord.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MYRRH

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; drink, and drink deeply, O beloved ones! I sleep, but my heart is awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of night. I have put off my garment; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I dirty them again? My beloved put his hand into the opening of the door, and my inner parts yearned for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn; he was gone. My soul failed when he spoke; I sought him, but found him not; I called him—he answered me not. The watchmen who go about the city found me. They struck me; they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil from me. I adjure, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved,

what shall you tell him? That I am sick with love. (Song of Songs 5:1-8)

**THE LORD ENJOYING
THE RESULT OF HIS LABOR**

As chapter 5 begins, the king again refers to the Shulammitte maiden as “my sister, my bride.” The Lord and His lovers have a relationship that is of life and love. The term “sister” refers to their relation in life, and the term “bride” refers to their relationship of love. In life, we are the Lord’s sisters, and in love, we are His bride.

In this union of life and love the Lord says, “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.” Myrrh, spice, honeycomb, honey, wine, and milk are all types of what issues from the Lord in resurrection. At this stage, the Lord enjoys the fruits of His labor in His seeking one.

**“I HAVE GATHERED
MY MYRRH WITH MY SPICE”**

In saying, “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice,” the Lord is saying, “I have searched your heart and have found the operation and the work of My death in you. Instead of sin and the world, I find the scars and wounds which mark the work of the cross. The lessons of the cross that you have garnered I now gather for My enjoyment.” The experiences of death (represented by myrrh) that we pass through belong to the Lord. Although we paid the price to gain these experiences, they are ultimately for the Lord to enjoy in us.

This indicates that the seeking one by this time has forfeited all right of authority over herself to the Lord. In chapter 1 she could separate her enjoyment from the Lord’s, saying, “While the king was at his table, my spikenard gave forth its fragrance.” Now,

however, the experiences she has acquired of the Lord are not only for her enjoyment, but they also belong to the Lord for His. She and He are now united as one. This is indeed a deep experience.

**“I HAVE EATEN MY HONEYCOMB WITH MY HONEY;
I HAVE DRUNK MY WINE WITH MY MILK”**

In addition to the operation of the cross, the Lord has also gained the rich refreshment of life through her, represented by the honeycomb with the honey and the wine with the milk. Where does the Lord gain this supply? He enjoys it from the garden of her heart. Our heart should become such a place of delight to the Lord.

In the past, it was we who looked for the Lord’s supply. Now it is He coming to look for us. Before, we asked for the Lord’s forgiveness and His blessing as those who were weak and in need of His mercy. Now we can tell Him, “My heart has become a delightful place to the Lord. Come, Lord. Eat, drink, and enjoy Yourself.” Eventually, the Lord will come and enjoy His work in us, partaking of the fruit of all His labor in our hearts.

Brothers and sisters, if your locality seems dysfunctional, probably there is none among you who has become like the Shulammitte in these verses. If in your locality there is much enjoyment of the Lord and the Lord has a way to go on, it is likely because at least a few among you are like this Shulammitte. Some are experiencing this life union with the Lord and are living in the riches of the resurrection. In such saints the Lord gains His satisfaction, nourishment, and supply. How wonderful if the Lord among us can say, “Eat, O friends; drink, and drink deeply, O beloved ones” (5:1)!

In his book on the Song of Songs, Watchman Nee writes that the friends here refer to the Triune God. According to John Nelson Darby, the friends are other saints, and the Lord does call His disciples His friends (John 15:15). But regardless how we explain the friends, in our experience we know that the Lord is happy when He gains a group of people, and many are revived and satisfied as they share in His enjoyment. If there are some in a church who are matured, rich in life, and one with Lord, that church will be a place

of enjoyment because of them. They are gardens in whom the Lord can enjoy something which others also can enjoy together with Him.

THE DEEPER CALLING OF THE CROSS

Starting from the second verse in chapter 5, the Lord begins to lead His seeker into another stage of experience. Remember, the Lord leads us into what He Himself has passed through and experienced. In this stage He shows us that although He had no sin, He suffered; although He was the King, He was mocked and reproached; and although He was blameless, He suffered the agony of the cross and of God's judgment. He didn't deserve what He suffered. He shouldn't have been mocked and reproached; He shouldn't have been rejected; and He shouldn't have been nailed to the cross. He was unappreciated and despised, even though He was the greatest person who ever walked the earth. What the Lord experienced was infinitely more unjust and unreasonable than what any other person has ever experienced.

Now the Lord calls His seeker to walk this unreasonable pathway, the same path the Lord chose to walk. He was misunderstood although He was holy. In like manner, we will be misunderstood although we are sanctified. He was despised although He was God's glory. We will be despised although we also possess glory. Evil was spoken of Him, although He was meek and lowly. We will also be slandered if we are meek and lowly. It is the Lord's desire that we enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ.

The Lord's afflictions today are for the producing of the church. In order for the church to be built up, some saints need to fill up what is yet lacking of these afflictions. The Lord has accomplished His part. Now we have to fulfill our part for the building up of the church. If we desire to serve the Lord and to be His bride, we need to make up that which is lacking, for sufferings upon the earth are still necessary before His building work is completed. The Lord wants us to fellowship with His sufferings. His sufferings must be

constituted into us to become our reality. Brothers and sisters, we need to be willing to go deeper. Even after becoming so one with the Lord, we still have to tell Him continually, “O Lord, I am not satisfied with my situation. I have to have more growth.”

“OPEN TO ME”

Let us now come to the verse. “I sleep, but my heart is awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of night” (5:2). The Shulammitte has truly grown in life. In saying, “I sleep, but my heart is awake,” it is evident that she has ceased from her own work. Now her own work and life have ceased. She is like one who is asleep; there is no further activity, work, endeavoring, or struggle. She is perfectly at rest. However, she is not truly asleep. Outwardly she is sleeping, but inwardly she is exercised. Her heart is awake. Her inner man is still very active.

However, she has still not achieved the state of perfection, so she still has to go forward. She needs more of the work of the cross. Therefore the Lord is knocking and asking her to pay yet a higher price. Though she sleeps, her heart is aware that the Lord is knocking. She is not completely separated from the Lord in her sleep.

The Lord here calls her “my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.” The Lord praises her in four aspects. Regarding life, she is His sister; regarding love, she is His love; regarding purity, she is like a dove; and regarding sanctification, she is His perfect one. The Lord asks this beautiful and lovely one to open to Him.

**“MY HEAD IS FULL OF DEW, MY LOCKS
WITH THE DROPS OF NIGHT”**

Here is a simple calling of the Lord, “Open to me, . . . for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of night.” What is portrayed in this scene? This is His experience at Gethsemane. The Lord reminds her of His sufferings at Gethsemane. In that

night, His head was full of dew and His locks were filled with the drops of night.

The Shulammitte considers herself to have achieved the highest level of experience: The Lord has a way in her; she has become the blessing of the church; she has experienced union with the Lord; and she is on her way to resurrection and glory. The Lord tells her, however, “You are content with your situation before man and God. You are in victory. Everyone praises you. However, I am still homeless. I am still wandering about. Do you realize it is night? Do you know I am outside? Do you know that my head is wet with the dew while you are enjoying your rest? Do you know that I am still suffering without much enjoyment even until now? You, on the contrary, are appreciated and loved as one who bestows so much help to others. I, however, am still wandering and drifting about homeless.”

Brothers and sisters, we would never even dream that the Lord would ask this of us. We do not know that the Lord is in such a state. There is nothing on the earth, however, that can really satisfy Him. God’s purpose has not yet been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we are so satisfied when we call on His name and touch Him in spirit. We are so satisfied when we enjoy the Lord. It is so easy for us to shout, “Hallelujah!” We don’t realize that the Lord is still a wanderer, that His head is full of dew and His locks with the drops of night. We don’t know that He is still waiting for the appearance of the morning.

**“I HAVE PUT OFF MY GARMENT; HOW CAN I
PUT IT ON AGAIN? I HAVE WASHED MY FEET;
HOW CAN I DIRTY THEM AGAIN?”**

The Shulammitte is indeed now spiritually perceptive. She recognizes the knocking of her Lord’s hand. However, her response is, “I have put off my garment; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I dirty them again?” She doesn’t understand the Lord’s call. Her feeling is that the work is good, that the saints are being helped, and that she has become a garden full of

riches for the Lord's enjoyment.

The garment here can be interpreted as our old man. It can also refer to the coat that is put on over armor. She seems to be saying, "Lord, I have taken off the coat and put on the whole armor of God to fight for You. I lead the church to go forward. Why do You ask me to leave what I have built? Why do You want to take away the powder of spices and the gifts that You have given me? Lord, what are You talking about? I am full of strength and victory now. I am in the realm of ascension. Why do You ask me to go back to a situation of dryness and weakness? I have washed my feet; how can I dirty them again? I have become separated from the world; how can I return to dirty my feet there again?"

Brothers and sisters, we may have experienced something before the Lord to the extent that we can say, "Awake, O north wind; and come, O south wind!" and we may even be able to tell the Lord, "I am Your servant, Your bride, and Your garden." We might feel that we have a certain position in God's work. We could become so satisfied that we would want to remain there and never go elsewhere. Thus when the Lord calls us, we refuse and say, "I have put off my garment; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I dirty them again?"

We might think that the Lord wants us to remain in our spiritually exalted state. We forget that although we have helped a few, there are multitudes of saints still under Satan's power. We may have nourished some, but look how many are still in need of spiritual feeding. Our lack of realization causes us to reply the way we do. We forget that there is still a long way to go before the Lord can claim His corporate Bride. There are many more who need to be saved and cared for. Thus far our having the same heart as the Lord's and our being one with Him are limited to our small sphere of experience. We haven't yet entered into all the riches of the Lord. His riches haven't fully become our riches. The Lord, however, will not force us to follow Him. All He can do is keep knocking and asking until we become willing to follow Him again.

“MY BELOVED PUT HIS HAND INTO THE OPENING OF THE DOOR, AND MY INNER PARTS YEARNED FOR HIM”

The Shulammitte says, “My beloved put his hand into the opening of the door, and my inner parts yearned for him” (5:4). In chapter 4, the seeker ravished the Lord’s heart with one glance of her eyes (4:9). Here He ravishes our hearts by showing us His hand. In this stage, the maiden doesn’t mention anything to the daughters of Jerusalem, for she has entered into heights of experience where companions are unable to help anymore.

When the Lord calls us at this stage, He reveals to us His hand. It may be during a time of prayer or fellowship or during a time of dealing before the Lord. We don’t quite understand how it happens, but the love of the Lord encourages us to pursue Him again by His hand bearing the mark of the nail. His scars and His lowliness in suffering appear to us again.

When we were on top of everything in the heavenly realm, all was victorious and satisfactory. Without our realizing it, the vision of the cross faded away. We lived in its victory, but forgot from whence the victory came. We lived in the riches of Christ, but forgot what produced those riches. We departed from the foundation, and as a result, we find ourselves unable to follow Him when He calls us again.

Nevertheless, the Lord places His hand into the opening of our door. Praise the Lord that we still have an opening! Our heart is awake. We still love the Lord, and deep within us we still have a place for us to meet Him. Although we are full of excitement and enjoyment and joy as one standing on the peak of spiritual experience, we still have an opening for the Lord to display His hand. When we see His hand, our protests dissolve.

It may take a long time, however, for us both to experience and answer His call. Perhaps the Lord has asked us to open for Him several times, but we have not been able to respond. Deep within us, we know the Lord has a request for us. We know He is asking us to carry the cross. We just cannot figure out the reason.

The Lord says, “Open to Me,” but we think, “How can I open

the door? Things couldn't be better than they are now. And aren't these all from the Lord and for the Lord? Why would I jeopardize this?" We go through a long period of struggle, although the Lord exposes His nail-marked hand and shows us that He is still on the outside, with His head full of dew and His locks wet with the drops of night. We remain inside, even though the Lord is in another realm. We just cannot answer His request.

Since we are in uncertainty, the Lord places His hand into the opening of the door, which symbolizes our heart. Because we love Him, there is a certain place within us that is easily touched by the Lord. The Lord seems to say, "Look at My hand. I went to the cross and shed My blood for you. Look at My hand. You should know My visage and form became marred for you (Isa. 52:14). Now you are in bliss, and it is because of My labor. The glory you enjoy is the result of My suffering. When I was on the earth, I didn't have these blissful, glorious experiences. My experience was of loneliness and like a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2-3). I was reproached, scourged, and nailed to the cross. I display to you My hand to show you that I am the Lord of suffering."

When the Lord puts in His hand, our hearts melt and we fall down before Him. It seems that we suddenly wake up. We thought we were His bed and His palanquin. We thought that wherever we went, people were blessed. Now we repent to the Lord for all these circumstances. We thought all this was the result of our labor. Now we realize that we shouldn't dwell on these things. We also realize that our past willingness to go to the mountain of myrrh was for gaining the glory of men.

We have to be saved from our work, from our serving, and from our helping others, realizing that the Lord's head is full of dew, and His locks are full of the drops of night. He is hungry and thirsty. He has no place to stay. He is still mocked and reproached by people. He has no rest, no way to accomplish His desire.

Praise the Lord, for we still love Him, even though we have fallen into works. Everything we had collapses when the Lord touches us in this way. When we see His hand, our inner parts yearn for Him. We have a new revival when we thus touch His

love again. We realize, “Lord, I have been wrong all these years. The real journey starts from this point.” We need the previous four chapters to arrive at this juncture, but no matter how glorious are those experiences of the first four chapters, no matter how precious it is to be a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, a fountain in gardens, a well of living water, streams from Lebanon, and so on, the impurities of self are still present. Even in the most glorious moment, there is still the enjoyment for the self. May we all come to this point and be able to say, “Lord, in Your light I now abhor everything else. I want to rise up. My inner parts yearn for You as I see Your hand.”

“I ROSE UP TO OPEN TO MY BELOVED”

Thank the Lord. The Shulammite now says, “I rose up to open to my beloved.” This time she really pays the price. She seems to tell the Lord, “Lord, I surrender to You. I am willing to pay any price. I am willing to answer all Your requests. I desire what You desire. I choose what You choose. I am determined to put myself into death. I want to have a complete union with You.”

When she opens the door for the Lord, she says, “My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.” She knows what the price must now be. It is different from anything she has paid before. She knows now that if she presses on, there can be no return. She will lose all the fame and praise she has acquired. She will become a lonely person, living on the cross. No one will sympathize with her. To the Lord alone will she be joined, living on the earth only for His satisfaction.

When she opens to the Lord, she can say, “My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.” In her submission, she can see myrrh on her hand. Her situation is like that expressed by the hymnist, “Oh, I’ll praise Thee, even if weeping mingle with my song” (*Hymns*, #626). She knows that her obedience will lead to death, and that everything she has will be taken away from her. What she sees now is not the Lord of ascension and glory, but the Lord of marred visage and of wander-

ing. She now knows that the way of the Lord is the unsympathetic and unreasonable way of the cross.

Brothers and sisters, this consecration is the issue of all the consecrations in your life. For this experience, you must forsake all your previous experience. The Lord tells her, “My request upon you now is different than before. You can no longer have other yearnings or desires or plans. You cannot even have other labors. From now on, you can only wander with Me. You can only wait for the city whose foundations are laid by God, and today make your home in tents. You can only experience the work of My cross. You have to allow Me to strip you of everything—your wisdom, your ability, your work, your enjoyment, your praise, and your glory. I will take away everything you treasured in the past and leave you nothing but Myself. From now on, you have no companion save Myself. You will thus walk apart with Me until I come.”

I believe this will become a serious bone of contention between you and the Lord. There will be a long period of struggle, for this is the end of everything for us. When people consecrate themselves to the Lord, they usually don't know what is involved. Although we said, “This is the end of the world,” we said to ourselves, “There is still the church,” and we still depended on the church life. At this time, the Lord even takes away our dependence on the church. We will definitely wrestle with Him until the day we finally surrender to His request.

When you do finally consent, it will be your salvation. This is a great price to pay. Not so many among us see it, and even fewer can pay it. Brothers and sisters, are you willing to walk this way? There will only be pain and shame. No understanding. No sympathy. You will be seen as nothing but trouble and a waste of time; you will become as the offscouring of the world and the scum of all things (1 Cor. 4:13).

**“I OPENED TO MY BELOVED, BUT MY BELOVED
HAD WITHDRAWN; HE WAS GONE”**

The Bible continues, “I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn; he was gone.” At this time, the Shulammitte is in a sorrowful and piteous state. She finally answers the Lord’s calling. However, as she rises up, the Lord disappears. Perhaps you have had this experience: When you are arguing with the Lord, He seems to be with you all the time, calling to you. Then when you finally open to Him, He is gone! This really seems frustrating.

The Lord seems to say, “When I called you to walk the way of the cross at first, you didn’t want to follow Me. Now I would like you to taste what it feels like to have your head full of dew.” Therefore, you completely lose the presence of the Lord. When you read the Bible, there is no light. When you pray, there is no answer. You cannot help or supply others any longer. You don’t look like a man with the Lord’s presence like you did before. Instead, you seem to be in a state of desolation. Everyone wonders why such a strong brother has become so weak, and why such a rich person has become so poor. You cannot find any comfort from others anywhere. This is the experience of the Lord’s death. The seeker loses the presence of her Lord, and she laments, “My beloved had withdrawn; he was gone.”

“MY SOUL FAILED WHEN HE SPOKE”

The Shulammitte says further, “My soul failed when he spoke.” She seems to be saying, “When He called me, I really desired to answer His call, but I was not able to. My spirit was willing to follow, but my flesh could not. When He called, my soul failed. I was not unwilling to follow. I just couldn’t understand why He wanted me to walk with Him in this way. Why did He treat me like this? Why did He ask so much of me? Although I was slow to submit, my heart was yearning for Him when He spoke.”

**“I SOUGHT HIM, BUT FOUND HIM NOT;
I CALLED HIM—HE ANSWERED ME NOT”**

How can the Lord treat someone like this? “I sought him, but found him not; I called him—he answered me not.” No matter how earnestly she calls upon Him, He has no response. Even though she renews her consecration over and over, there is no answer.

Now when she meets the watchmen who go about the city—the older brothers—they strike her and wound her. They show her no sympathy, and even more, they deal harshly with her. Before, they wept with her. Now they rebuke her for weeping. Before, they prayed for her when she was weak. Now they scold her for her weakness. Blame is heaped upon her, and she cannot comprehend the reason.

**“THE KEEPERS OF THE WALLS
TOOK MY VEIL FROM ME”**

Then she says, “The keepers of the walls took my veil from me.” She was very beautiful and appeared to be a holy woman. Now her veil is taken away, and she is completely exposed to others. Her spirit seems to dry up, and she loses all her respect.

Can you imagine that someone so deep in the Lord could fall into this poor situation? The Lord’s calling has caused her to lose all the sympathy from others, and even to lose the inward presence of the Lord. Outwardly she suffers insult from the brothers and sisters. She loses all her beauty before man.

Since she is willing to pay the price, the Lord pours upon her the hardest, heaviest, and cruelest cross. She is dry inwardly and shameful outwardly. She has absolutely nothing to boast in any longer. Instead, she is put to shame to the uttermost.

Now she truly realizes the way of the cross. Her walk before was not completely pure. After this affliction, her way is purified completely, and she is finally able to focus solely upon the Lord instead of the praise of others. What she now wants is to gain the heart of the Lord alone. The work can no longer ensnare her. No

other person can hold her any longer. Even the feeling of the sweet presence of the Lord or the feeling of dryness cannot affect her. Now she knows she is on the way of the cross.

ASKING FOR HELP FROM THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

Although she is in such a weak state, she lives in the purpose of the Lord. Her words still carry authority as she says, “I adjure, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, what shall you tell him? That I am sick with love.” Now she ceases her complaining about the Lord’s treatment of her. She is so experienced that now, in all kinds of difficulties, she can say, “I know everything will be fine as long as my relationship with the Lord is right.”

Although she is misunderstood, frustrated, and in tribulation, she still asks the brothers and sisters to pray for her. The daughters of Jerusalem have received much help from her in the past. Now she pleads with them, “Please tell the Lord in your prayer that I am sick with love. I truly love Him. I just want to gain Him.”

In chapter 2 she also had claimed that she was sick with love (2:5). That sickness came from the banqueting house and all the raisin cakes. It was a result of all the rich enjoyment in the church life. Here her sickness comes from scourging and sufferings. It comes from the dryness, misunderstanding, reproach, and persecution. Here she is in the shadow of extreme darkness, yet she can still testify, “How I love the Lord!”

When I come to this part, I cannot help but bow my head and worship the Lord. May this become our experience. May the Lord have mercy upon us so that we could experience Him unceasingly. In this stage, we do not care about how we serve, how we supply, or whether we are recognized. We come to know that what He treasures is nothing but that we would desire Him.

He who follows the Lord in this way knows who and where the Lord is. The Lord is not resting. He is wandering, still without a home. His head is full of dew, and His locks are full of the drops of night. His hands bear the marks of the nails. He is calling us to

walk the way of the cross with Him. There is no joy, no praise, no supply, and no enjoyment on this way. We won't get excited or have a glorious testimony. Nevertheless, we can tell others, "How I love the Lord!"

We will all go this way eventually. Everything must fade away until only the Lord is with us. What do we eventually receive in the church? Eventually we receive nothing but shame, misunderstanding, and reproach. Regardless of the shame or misunderstanding, we can still tell Him, "Lord, I just love You. I may have lost all my ability, and I may receive evil reports from everyone, but the main thing is that I can still tell You, 'Lord, I love You.'" There is no one but the Lord who is worthy of our love.

How beautiful is this ending! How humble she has become! She no longer says, "O daughters of Jerusalem, do not rouse me up," but instead, "If you find my beloved, just tell him that I am sick with love." Although the daughters of Jerusalem were blessed and supplied through her, she humbly asks them to pray for her. "If you find the Lord in your prayer, please tell Him I desire to see Him. I just love Him. Everything can be taken away from me, but I still love the Lord."

This is the way we should walk in our lives. Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER TEN

MY BELOVED

“What is your beloved more than some other’s beloved, O you most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than some other’s beloved, that you adjure us so? My beloved is dazzling white yet ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the streams of water, bathed in milk, fitly set. His cheeks are like a bed of spices, mounds of sweetly fragrant herbs; his lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. His hands are tubes of gold, set with beryl; his belly is an ivory work, overlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of white marble, set upon bases of gold; his appearance is like Lebanon, as excellent as the cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” (Song of Songs 5:9-16)

REVIEW

In the first four chapters, the Shulammitte maiden experienced sufferings which could be considered as the discipline of the Spirit.

She suffered because she needed to grow and gain Christ. Indeed, without such sufferings there could be no growth in life. If it were not for them, she would still be abiding in sin, the world, her self, and her natural ability. Due to these sufferings she was able to become Solomon's bed, palanquin, and crown. Because of them, the Lord could exclaim, "Oh, you are beautiful!" After passing through the dealings of the Lord, she became a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed for the Lord.

Beginning from chapter 5, however, the Lord has another expectation for His lover. At this time, He seeks to bring her out from abiding in the enjoyment of His victory to walk the pathway of the fellowship of His sufferings. To the Shulammitte, this seems utterly contrary to her desire to enjoy the Lord. Unless she follows Him in this way, however, she is unable to make up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body's sake.

On the one hand, the Lord has worked on her to the extent that she has become pure and sanctified. As such, she is faithful and well-pleasing to the Lord. On the other hand, what the Lord experienced has not yet become her reality; she has not yet met with misunderstanding, loneliness, and reproach. She needs to know scourging in her innocence and piercing in her blamelessness. Then what the Lord has experienced will become her reality.

However, in her present exalted state, she cannot understand why she needs to experience this kind of unreasonable suffering. After all, where could the Lord possibly lead her that would be better than the Lord's resurrection and ascension? She has no desire to put on a garment and become cloaked again, and she doesn't want to dirty her feet again. As a victorious and manifested saint, she has no inclination to follow the Lord to lesser realms.

When we come to this stage, we will fully identify with her in her hesitation. As those who speak for the Lord in the church, how can we allow the Lord to take away His anointing? How can we agree to let the Lord strip us of our ability? Why would we enter a phase where those we have helped and blessed would now reject and refuse us?

The Lord's call in this chapter reveals that we must enter into

the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings and death. We need to carry our cross so that we may do our part to fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ.

Because of the Shulammite's reluctance, the Lord puts His hand into the opening of the door. The mark of the nail upon His hand moves her so that she is eventually able to say, "Lord, since You have called, I have been restless and not at peace. But now I am willing to obey Your will and magnify You. Lord, I have been unwilling to rise up and follow You on Your path of rejection and suffering. But now my heart is ready."

Although she has entered into the enjoyment of the Lord's life and loved the Lord absolutely, she now finds herself separated from the Lord, saying, "I sought him but found him not. I called him but he answered me not." The Lord seems to have left her destitute. At this time, the Lord arranges for her to be struck by those who should help her. She is troubled. She has committed no sin, nor is she loving the world. The reason for her suffering is actually her purity before the Lord.

It is indeed a deep experience when the Lord takes away His presence and at the same time arranges that we experience shame and misunderstanding. Before, we were considered the church's blessing. Now, we are reproached by those who have received benefit from us, and we suffer unjustly.

Not only do the watchmen who go about the city strike the maiden, but the keepers of the wall also take away her veil. This indicates that her spiritual blessedness has been stripped away and that she is now seen as someone who is in weakness and failure. She doesn't know where to hide, for she can no longer show herself approved in anyone's eyes.

"I AM SICK WITH LOVE"

All she can do now is to humbly request, "O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him that I am sick with love" (5:8). In chapter 2, she also said she was sick with love, but that was in the Lord's presence (2:5). Here, she is bereft of the Lord. She

feels dried up inside and experiences shame in the presence of others. She has no companion; no one will even give her the time of day. She is so lonely. However, her love for the Lord has not altered. She still can say, “Lord, I love You. Even though You allow me to be mistreated, and even though You have left me destitute, Lord, please remember that I still love You.” How pure her heart is! How well pleasing is such love to the Lord!

**“WHAT IS YOUR BELOVED MORE
THAN SOME OTHER’S BELOVED?”**

In verse 9 the Shulammitte is asked, “What is your beloved more than some other’s beloved, O you most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than some other’s beloved, that you adjure us so?” Indeed the maiden has experienced a turn in her spiritual pursuing. Hearing her testimony, others desire to know, “Why is the Lord so special to you that you beg us to pray for you in this way?”

Brothers and sisters, those with less experience can testify how the Lord is with them in this matter or that matter. Those who have gone on to deeper experiences, however, have more testimonies of how the Lord is not with them. Previously, they could speak so much about the Lord in the meetings. However, after becoming more experienced, a person doesn’t always readily share his experiences with others, for his experience has gone beyond words. If you are someone who has looked with the Lord from the top of Senir and Hermon and from the lions’ dens and the leopards’ mountains, if you are someone who has ravished the Lord’s heart with one glance of your eyes, you are able to testify that the Lord is precious, but words will fail you. Although you may be dry, unappreciated, and unfairly treated, you will still feel the Lord is precious. This will cause others to ask how it is that you can feel so. In spite of everything, based upon all your experience, your testimony is still that He is worthy.

Because of our past experience, we can speak of all His detailed inner working. We can also share about how transcendent

our Lord is as the resurrected One. The more we speak of Him, the more we become excited. He is altogether lovely to us. How is it that we can testify this even though we don't have His anointing or His presence? It is because we have the assurance produced from the experience of many years.

This testimony is not according to our feeling or what we touch at the moment. We are not like those in the Old Testament who spoke because the Spirit was upon them. Our speaking and realization are based upon our history of experience with the Lord and upon what the Lord has constituted into us.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to truly serve the Lord, we have to be constituted with Him. If we want to be able to give a testimony of value before the Lord, we cannot just testify according to inspiration. Our testimony should be according to what we have subjectively experienced. If we have a history of genuine experience, we will find that we are able to testify of the Lord to others whether we have the Lord's presence or not.

1. "My Beloved Is Dazzling White yet Ruddy"

In verse 10 the Shulammitte responds, "My beloved is dazzling white yet ruddy." The Bible likewise describes David as being ruddy in appearance (1 Sam. 16:12). Whiteness speaks of purity, and ruddiness (having a rosy complexion) speaks of the richness and vibrance of life. The Lord's being dazzling white, yet ruddy, indicates that He is rich in life and is shining with life.

When people reach the age of seventeen or eighteen, that is the time they most approach being "dazzling white and ruddy," for at that time they are most full of the vigor of life. Our Lord is such; He never gets old. Here the maiden forgets being struck and wounded by the brothers, her veil being taken away, and the Lord not being with her, for she says, "Brothers and sisters, our Lord is full of vitality and the promise of life. Whenever we touch Him, we touch newness and vigor." This is her subjective experience, for her speaking is with assurance.

You are blessed if you can testify that the Lord is dazzling white

yet ruddy. Those who haven't attained to this level of maturity testify as to how wonderful the Lord's leading and blessing are. They are only able to speak of what the Lord has done for them. But those who have experienced the work of the Lord over many years can bear witness to the Lord's attractiveness as one full of life.

2. "Distinguished among Ten Thousand"

The Lord is the chief among ten thousand. He will draw all men to Himself if He is lifted up (John 12:32). He is full of life. Wherever He goes, tens of thousands follow Him.

3. "His Head Is the Finest Gold"

In verse 11 the Shulammitte tells us, "His head is the finest gold." This indicates that the Lord's thought, will, arrangement, and plan for us are according to God's eternal purpose and divinity. Her testimony is that He is never wrong. If you don't really follow Him, you will complain about how He attempts to lead. But those who have truly experienced the work of God can testify that His head is of the finest gold. We cannot form a better plan than His. We cannot arrange or schedule things better than He can. The things we desire for ourselves cannot match what He desires for us. The Lord's arrangement is according to God's nature, God's plan, and God's desire, and His work brings us into God's plan, nature, and desire. The maiden's realization of the Lord here is very high.

4. "His Locks Are Wavy, As Black As a Raven"

The Shulammitte continues by saying, "His locks are wavy, as black as a raven." A raven flies. Being like a raven signifies His eternal power. Our hair should be like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead, whereas His is as black as a raven. He can fly and is full of power. We also have power, but we need to submit to the Lord. His power is like a river that flows through us. How should we live our life? We should live in His locks, which are

wavy and full of power. His head is full of supreme wisdom, and His power is immeasurable. By means of His power we can live a heavenly life.

**5. “His Eyes Are like Doves beside the Streams
of Water, Bathed in Milk, Fitly Set”**

Then the Shulammitte says, “His eyes are like doves beside the streams of water, bathed in milk, fitly set” (5:12). A dove’s eyes can only look at one thing. The eyes of the Lord also look at us in this way. The eyes of the Lord are not behind a veil. They are beside the streams of water. Streams of water speak of life supply. As His eyes are upon us, He supplies us according to our needs. If we need discipline, He will not supply us sympathy. If we need blessing, He will bless us. If we need joy, He will richly supply us with joy. If we need to weep, He will let us weep. He is full of nourishment because His eyes are like doves beside the streams of water, bathed in milk. Moreover, His eyes are fitly set. He accurately sees what we need. When He fixes His eyes upon us, He also supplies and nourishes us according to what He alone can accurately discern.

**6. “His Cheeks Are like a Bed of Spices,
Mounds of Sweetly Fragrant Herbs”**

The maiden continues, “His cheeks are like a bed of spices.” All fragrant powders are from the Lord. He is a bed of spices. When we unite with Him, we will spontaneously experience the work of myrrh, frankincense, and all kinds of spices. In the past, we might have thought that it was we who paid the price and took up our cross to follow the Lord. Now we realize that when we grow in Him, we spontaneously take up our cross, for even our ability to pay the price comes from Him.

The Shulammitte has enjoyed Him as a bed composed of mounds of sweetly fragrant herbs. She has also seen His fruit in others whom she has supplied out of her enjoyment. When we grow in

Him as the spices, those we take care of will be produced as the fruit. The more death we experience, the more we bear fruit. If His death operates in us, others will grow. Hence, the bed here is but one, while the mounds are plural in number. We all need to receive the Lord's rich supply if we wish to bear sweet fruit to Him.

7. "His Lips Are Lilies, Dripping with Liquid Myrrh"

Verse 13 continues, "His lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh." The words of the Lord are pure and clean like lilies. They are full of fragrance and grace like liquid myrrh (Psalm 45:2). His grace is manifested out of His death.

When the Lord speaks, His lips drip with liquid myrrh, meaning that when He speaks, we are led to experience His being put to death. When the Lord's word is scarce and His appearing is rare (1 Sam. 3:1), we find it easy to go our own way, untroubled. If He does not speak, we find it easy to choose a college, to dedicate ourselves to our work, or to pursue our own desire.

From a natural point of view, it seems that those who do not love the Lord are better off than those who do, for if we want to obey the Lord's speaking, we will experience being put to death. The Lord's leading is closely tied to the cross. We all desire to have the Lord's speaking, but when His word comes to us, it will bring in the cross. Only in this way, however, can we acquire the testimony of His victory.

8. "His Hands Are Tubes of Gold, Set with Beryl"

The seeker also says, "His hands are tubes of gold, set with beryl." His hands refer to His work, and the tubes of gold set with beryl refer to His being unshakable. This indicates that when He holds us in His hands, we cannot get away until He finishes His work. He will not let anything slip. When I am held in His hands, I can live in them. According to Watchman Nee, beryl refers to stability:

the Lord's hands cannot be moved from their intended purpose.

What a wonderful testimony this is! The maiden has no fear of the Lord's hand failing her. She has no fear of falling as she follows the Lord, for she is assured that the hands that hold her are steadfast. She is enfolded in His hands. His hands are like tubes of gold set with beryl, so that she cannot possibly end up somewhere the Lord does not intend for her. She knows that she is the object of His workmanship and that He keeps her in His care.

9. "His Belly Is an Ivory Work, Overlaid with Sapphires"

She further states, "His belly is an ivory work, overlaid with sapphires." With His hands, He holds us firmly. But this verse reveals that He is also tender, for in the Bible the belly speaks of sympathy and compassion.

If we want to acquire ivory, an animal has to die. The Lord's belly is an ivory work, which indicates that He first experienced suffering and then death. He was sculpted as an ivory work. The Lord has experienced what we are experiencing now. He can be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, and He sympathizes with us when He works upon us and sculpts us. He knows what we are going through and what we are feeling. He is with us when we are weeping. He is with us in all our sorrow and hardship. This is why His belly is revealed to be a work of ivory. Furthermore, His belly, which signifies His feeling towards us, is overlaid with sapphires. Sapphires are blue, indicating that they are of the heavens. Even at this moment He is touched with our feeling while He is in the heavenly places.

10. "His Legs Are Pillars of White Marble, Set upon Bases of Gold"

In verse 15 she continues, "His legs are pillars of white marble, set upon bases of gold." Legs speak of His move, and marble in Hebrew is the same as fine linen. This indicates that His move is in

a fine and uplifted humanity. Pillars signify gravity. Being set upon the bases of gold indicates that the righteousness and fine humanity of the Lord are unshakable because they are based on His divinity. He is unshakable in His glorious divinity, and He is perfect in righteousness in every way.

11. “His Appearance Is like Lebanon, As Excellent As the Cedars”

To her, “His appearance is like Lebanon, as excellent as the cedars.” The Lord’s head, hair, eyes, cheeks, lips, hands, and belly are like Lebanon. What a heavenly person He is!

Although the maiden is in weakness and shame, and although she lacks the Lord’s presence, she still can testify, “His appearance is like Lebanon.” The Lord is heavenly. If we can testify as she does, it indicates that our relationship with the Lord is no longer related to earthly blessing, and we feel no earthly price is truly a price at all. We would even feel ashamed to say that forsaking anything was a price we had to pay to follow Christ.

Moreover, His appearance is as excellent as the cedars. Cedar refers to humanity. This indicates that He is such a glorious and excellent man.

12. “His Mouth Is Sweetness Itself”

In verse 16 she continues by saying, “His mouth is sweetness itself.” How do we know His mouth is so sweet? It is because we have tasted what He has tasted. Because of our pursuing and fellowship with Him, we can say, “His mouth is sweetness itself.” What He measures to us is what He has also experienced. Thus, we enjoy what He has tasted. According to Watchman Nee, “His mouth” refers to the work of the Lord. As we experience His work step by step, His work becomes our reality.

13. “He Is Altogether Desirable”

The maiden has experienced this person to an extent that she can say, “He is altogether desirable.”

Our Lord is altogether desirable from His head to His feet, from inside to outside, from His wisdom to His leading, and from His dealings to His preservation. This is not something that can be spoken after touching Him in a meeting, or in the midst of an inspiration. This testimony is the summation of subjective experience. This testimony can only be borne by someone who has experienced the Lord for many years. Only experience lends credence to such a testimony.

14. “This Is My Beloved, and This Is My Friend, O Daughters of Jerusalem”

Finally, the Shulammitte declares, “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” She can say this because the Lord has become her reality. She does not say, “This will be my beloved one day.” Hers is the voice of experience, and such is her testimony.

Although she cannot answer the Lord’s calling immediately, she is still excited when she speaks of Him. Although she is in shame and loneliness, she still can give such a glorious testimony. Her experience now is far deeper than when she proclaimed, “Your anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance,” or, “Catch the little foxes.”

Brothers and sisters, as we read this book, we gain a fresh appreciation of how important it is that we follow the Lord. Oh, how we need His mercy that one day we may give such a glorious testimony, founded upon such deep experiences of Christ. May the day come when we all can declare, “My beloved is dazzling yet ruddy. He is distinguished among ten thousand. He is altogether desirable.” Brothers and sisters, only the Lord can save a sinner to such an extent. Praise be to Him!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PRINCE'S DAUGHTER

“Where has your beloved gone, O you most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and gather lilies. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies. You are as beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem, as terrible as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me, your hair is like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which have borne twins, and none of them is bereaved of her young. Your cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate behind your veil. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her who bore her. The daughters saw her, and they called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, they also praised her. Who is this woman who looks forth like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as clear as the sun, as terrible as an

army with banners? I went down to the orchard of nuts to see the freshness of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I was aware, my soul set me among the chariots of my noble people. Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may gaze at you. Why should you gaze at the Shulammite, as upon the dance of two camps?" (Song of Songs 6:1—7:13)

How beautiful are your footsteps in sandals, O prince's daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilled artist. Your navel is a round goblet that never lacks mixed wine; your belly is a heap of wheat, fenced in by lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like a tower of ivory; your eyes, like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim; your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces Damascus. Your head upon you is like Carmel, and the locks of your head like purple. The king is fettered by your tresses. How beautiful and how pleasant in delights you are, O love! This your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like the clusters. I said, I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its branches; and let your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your nose like apples, and the roof of your mouth like the best wine—Going down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who sleep. I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages. Let us rise up early for the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, if the blossom is open, if the pomegranates are in bloom; there I will give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and over our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old. These, my beloved, I have stored up for you.

**THE LONGING OF
THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM**

When the Shulammitte says in her faith and assurance, “This is my beloved, and this is my friend,” the daughters of Jerusalem ask her, “Where has your beloved gone, O you most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?” (6:1). Since her Lord is so wonderful, they desire to seek Him with her, for this beloved she describes seems so different from those of others.

After the Lord has worked in you a number of years, you should find that you are able to render help to others, even though you might not have the Lord’s presence, and even though you may be suffering rejection, shame, and spiritual dryness. At a time such as that, what you testify is not your feeling, revelation, or enlightenment, but rather your experiences of God’s work upon you. It will not matter whether you are “up” or “down,” for by that time you will have been in God’s hand for many years. Regardless of what your situation may be, your words of experience will be able to help others. Thus, even though you may be in weakness, you will be able to help others pursue Christ. Because of you, others will say, “Let us seek Him together.”

THE RECOVERY OF THE LORD’S PRESENCE

**“My Beloved Has
Gone Down to His Garden”**

Then the maiden suddenly states, “My beloved has gone down to his garden.” She now knows where He is. He is in her heart—the enclosed garden—and nothing can separate them.

In chapter 5, she asked the daughters of Jerusalem to pray for her and to help her find her Lord, because she truly loved Him. When she rouses herself to describe Him, her relationship with the Lord is restored immediately. She is encouraged and realizes that actually the Lord hasn’t left her. She can say with the writer of

Hymns, #254, “O strangely art Thou with us, Lord, neither in height nor depth to seek.” Her beloved is in her.

She seemingly says, “Where can you find Him? Let me tell you, my Lord is in His garden, and I am His garden. If you seek the Lord, you can find Him here in me. If you want to experience Him, I can tell you how. If you want to know Him, I can show you the way.” Now the maiden is able to testify that nothing can separate her from the Lord—she is in the Lord and the Lord is in her. For to her, to live is Christ, and her living on the earth is one that magnifies Christ (Phil. 1:20-21).

“To the Beds of Spices”

The Shulammitte continues to say that her beloved has gone not only into his garden, but also “to the beds of spices.” She realizes not only that she is the Lord’s garden, but also that other saints are also beds of spices, for they are also experienced and full of life.

We need to remember that our growth and life supply come not only from the Lord but also from brothers and sisters. The church’s supply does not come from the Lord alone; the saints also supply the church with life. Having the experiences of the Lord, they are the source of life supply, and they are the beds of spices in the church.

Her beloved has also gone down to the garden “to feed in the gardens and gather lilies.” The Lord is shepherding and gathering lilies in the hearts of His believers. Lilies refer to purity and joy, which come from the Lord Himself and are also for Him.

“I Am My Beloved’s, and My Beloved Is Mine”

Now she testifies, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” In chapter 2 she said, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (2:16). Originally, she was the center, and her spiritual enjoyment and pursuit were for herself. Now she realizes that if the Lord’s head is full of dew, so must her head be full of dew, and if His locks are

wet with the drops of night, so must hers be likewise (5:2). She is now fully willing to be identified with the Lord in His sufferings.

Here, her center of life has shifted. It is no longer she who is the center, but the Lord. She can now say, “I am the Lord’s, and He is mine.”

Brothers and sisters, today you probably don’t have much assurance to say, “I am the Lord’s”; so far you can only say, “The Lord is mine.” For example, as this training nears its conclusion, you may become anxious as to how to go on or what to do next. However, if your experience is that you are your Beloved’s, you will have nothing to fear. You will know that whether you stay in your country or go abroad, you are the Lord’s. Whether you succeed or fail, you are the Lord’s. Whether things go up or down, you are still the Lord’s. When you are in complete union with the Lord, you can say, “Lord, I am completely Yours.”

The reality of the church life doesn’t lie in how much you labor or how many great things you accomplish. If you can truly say, “I am my Beloved’s,” it follows that you will be able to supply others and that they will long for your help.

Once you have this realization—“I am completely the Lord’s, I desire nothing but the Lord, and I love only Him”—you will have unspeakable rest. You will be delivered from trying to please others or to gain their praise. May the Lord deliver us from any other seeking so that we can honestly say, “I am the Lord’s. I am my Beloved’s, and He is mine.”

“He Pastures His Flock among the Lilies”

The loving seeker continues, “He pastures his flock among the lilies” (6:3). Just as He was shepherding before, so He is shepherding now. Just as He fed the flock previously (2:16), so He is feeding them now. This verse also indicates that there are many other “lilies” who look upon the Lord in faith, and the Lord takes care of them.

**THE LORD'S TESTIMONY
CONCERNING THE SHULAMMITE**

**1. A Beautiful and Lovely Dwelling before God
and a Terrible Victor before the Enemy**

Now the Lord testifies to the Shulammitte's beauty. He begins by saying, "You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem, as terrible as an army with banners" (6:4).

Here the Lord mentions three things. The first is that she is as beautiful as Tirzah. Tirzah is where Solomon's palace is located. Being as beautiful as Tirzah indicates that she is where the authority is. Because of her submission and her union with the Lord, her living is mingled with the King, and thus she manifests His kingship. We experience this when we are in the presence of certain brothers. Hearing their words, we just feel that they are as beautiful as Tirzah.

Second, the Lord mentions that she is as lovely as Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where the temple is, which symbolizes the church. "Jerusalem" is where the church of God is built up. If we are as lovely as Jerusalem, then we are a source of supply in the church. When people meet us, they will feel that the church's future is bright, for we exercise our portion for the building up of the church. We not only represent the King on earth, but also bring in the rest of God, for not only the kingship is with us, but also the dwelling place of God.

Third, the Lord appreciates that His lover is "as terrible as an army with banners." She manifests not only loveliness before God but also terribleness before the enemy and the world. Her presence strikes terror into the enemy's heart, and she also repulses the world so that it dares not show itself in the church life. Indeed she looks down with the Lord from the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains (4:8). How victorious she is!

**2. Her Love for the Lord Overwhelms Him—
“Turn Your Eyes Away from Me”**

When you are fully united with the Lord, not only will He affect you, but you also will affect Him. His word and movement affect you, and so do your words and movements affect Him.

This is why the Lord says, “Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me.” The Lord seemingly is saying, “When you look at Me, I cannot help but surrender. When you look at Me, I cannot help but be captured by you. Turn away your eyes from Me.” Her gaze overwhelms the Lord. Although the Lord says, “Turn away your eyes,” He certainly desires that she look at Him.

By this time, the Lord has led her to the extent that she has gained a full victory. Hers is not a victory in work, but in life. Because she lives in such purity before Him, she really captures His heart. When she prays, the Lord cannot help but answer her. She indeed experiences mingling with the Lord as one who dwells in His chambers and enjoys the most intimate fellowship there.

**3. Her Consecration, Her Submission, Her Ability
to Receive, and the Beauty of Her Hidden Life—
“Your Hair...Your Teeth...Your Cheeks”**

The king continues to appraise his lover, saying, “Your hair is like a flock of goats that repose on Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which have borne twins, and none of them is bereaved of her young. Your cheeks are like a piece of pomegranate behind your veil” (6:5b-7). He said this at the beginning of chapter 4 also. This repeated praise is given to encourage her. Although she may be weak or even slow in obeying, the Lord’s love for her does not change. He will not leave her. Whether we have just begun to follow the Lord or we have been following Him for many years, we all need this encouragement of the Lord.

**4. She Is the Only Masterpiece of God in Grace—
“My Perfect One Is but One;
She Is the Only One of Her Mother”**

In the next verse, the Lord continues by saying, “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her who bore her” (6:8-9a). Every believer has a love relationship with the Lord. However, their experiences of the Lord’s love in their relationship with Him are not all the same. Some in their relationship to the Lord are like queens, others are like concubines, and still others are like virgins.

Now the Lord seemingly tells her, “You seem perfect in every way. You are a victor before Me. Although I have sixty queens, eighty concubines, and virgins without number, you are unique. You are My dove and the perfect one. Although I also love the others, you are the only one of your mother.” (“Mother” here refers to grace.) “Only you are the product of My work of grace through these years. You are really beautiful. You are indeed victorious. You are the only one of your mother and the choice one of her who bore you.” Every matured overcomer is considered unique in the Lord’s eyes and the masterpiece of God’s grace. How greatly the Lord loves us! He is the one who bore us, and He is the one who loves us.

**5. “The Daughters Saw Her,
and They Called Her Blessed”**

We are then told, “The daughters saw her, and they called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, they also praised her” (6:9b). The daughters, queens, and concubines see her and call her blessed, realizing that she surpasses them in her relationship with the king. When those who are experienced and mature see someone who really loves the Lord, they will praise that person as a true servant of the Lord and as a wonderful product of the Lord’s work of grace.

**“WHO IS THIS WOMAN WHO LOOKS FORTH LIKE
THE DAWN, AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE MOON, AS CLEAR AS
THE SUN, AS TERRIBLE AS AN ARMY WITH BANNERS?”**

After the Lord praises her, the Spirit moves others to testify to her maturity. They ask, “Who is this woman who looks forth like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as clear as the sun, as terrible as an army with banners?”

In this appraisal five aspects of her maturity are held up for our appreciation:

The first aspect is her looking forth. In chapter 3, verse 6, it was asked, “Who is she who comes up from the wilderness?” Here the question is, “Who is this woman who looks forth like the dawn?” This description indicates something deeper than the previous one. At this time, she is mature and ready for the Lord’s return. She is adorned and is looking forth to see her Lord.

The second aspect that others praise is that she is like the dawn in her looking forth. Dawn is the time of morning light. This indicates that she is walking in the light and that she herself is manifested as light.

Those who are experienced in the things of the Lord know not to look back upon their past experiences. If you like to live in the past, or if you like to mention how you used to love the Lord, or how you experienced the Lord’s love in times past, you are not one who looks forth like the dawn. If you are someone who is like the morning dawn, you will look forth and only focus on the future, as Proverbs 4:18 says: “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the full day.” Those who look forth like the dawn feel that the future is bright. Here those who observe her say, “She looks forth like the dawn,” meaning that she keeps going forward and only desires the Lord’s coming.

The third aspect of her maturity is her being bright and beautiful, even like the moon. The moonlight is the reflection of the sun. In like manner, this seeker reflects God. Her words and her behavior magnify God as Paul did, for he could say, “Be imitators of me,

as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). She is one who reflects the riches of the Lord and manifests Him. Speaking and acting through Christ, she experiences the Lord’s presence continually.

The fourth aspect of praise is that she is as bright and clear as the sun. In the Bible, the sun typifies Christ Himself. Her being as bright and clear as the sun signifies that she is a totally new creation in Christ. She not only reflects Christ, but she is Christ Himself.

When you meet a person such as this, you will feel that you can hide nothing from him. For example, you may have it in your heart to complain a lot to a certain brother, but when you come into his presence, your desire to complain evaporates. Such a brother is like the sun that shines upon you, in whose light you see your error. All of a sudden in his presence, it seems all the problems, all the suffering, and all the difficult situations are not that serious, and you realize that they are nothing but your flesh. When such a brother shines upon you as the bright sun, all that is hidden in you will be exposed.

The fifth aspect of her maturity is her being a fearsome victor—she is as terrible as an army with banners. She is able to deal with the enemy, and she constantly is in victory. Moreover, she has another banner, that is, the banner of love. She goes from victory to victory carrying the banner of love.

LABORING WITH THE LORD

1. “I Went Down to the Orchard of Nuts”

Then the Shulammitte says, “I went down to the orchard of nuts” (by God’s mercy she begins to cooperate with the Lord; she has some realization of how to labor for Him and serve Him) “to see the freshness of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom” (6:11). Her seeing the freshness of the valley means that she is able to discern the work of God and the operation of God’s life. When she labors, she doesn’t ask others to follow in the way that she experienced the Lord’s blessing. She doesn’t expect that others should be blessed in the

way that she was blessed. It was the Lord who led her; others should follow Him. She went down to the Lord's "factory" to see the signs of God's work, and she saw the freshness of the valley. (The valley refers to those living under God's care.) Furthermore, she looks to see whether the vine has budded. This means that she wants to see whether the Lord has a further operation or leading. What she intends to do is to see whether the Spirit is leading His children forward.

2. "My Soul Set Me among the Chariots of My Noble People"

In the next verse she says, "Before I was aware, my soul set me among the chariots of my noble people." As she is so intent upon the work of God, she is lifted up in the Lord's triumph before she is aware of it. She realizes now that she and the Lord are one. Whenever the Lord moves forward, she also moves forward. When the Lord moves forward in the saints, she seemingly is reigning with Him, progressing along with the brothers and sisters. While she is with the brothers and sisters, she manifests the king's authority. She has impact among them and leads them further. Before she is even aware of it, she is bearing responsibility for the church and helping others to go forward.

3. Her Victory Is Worthy of Respect

In verse 13 the others cry, "Return, return, O Shulammitte; return, return, that we may gaze at you." Everyone is earnestly waiting for her return, for they are eager to learn more from her of the secret of her progress and victory.

They also testify that she is now indeed a Shulammitte, because she and the Lord are one. When they see her, it is as if they see the Lord. When they sit before her, it is as if they are sitting before the Lord. When they fellowship with her, they seem to be in fellowship with the Lord. As they gaze after her, they are eager to be with her.

Then the word says, "Why should you gaze at the Shulammitte,

as upon the dance of two camps?” The dance of two camps refers to Jacob’s vision of God’s angels after he left Laban. He called that place Mahanaim (Gen. 32:2), which literally means “two camps.” “The dance of two camps” can also be translated as “the company of two armies.” Jacob didn’t pay the price to gain the company of two armies; God prepared them. This beauty of the Shulammitte, however, comes at a price. The dance of two camps must be very exciting and magnetic, whereas the Shulammitte’s beauty is not like that. Her beauty is wholly a result of the work of the Spirit. Because she had paid the price, she obtained a spiritual capacity and great stores of experience.

Those who are not experienced would rather watch the dance of two armies. In the same vein, the daughters of Jerusalem are unable to appreciate the Shulammitte’s heart, the price she has paid, her tears, or her absolute obedience. Therefore when they shout, “Return, return, O Shulammitte; return, return, that we may gaze at you,” the Lord inserts His comment—“Why can’t you appreciate her? Why should you gaze upon her just as upon the dance of two camps? You should appreciate her with deeper understanding.” We need to realize that the Shulammitte’s experiences are a result of her paying the price. This is different from appreciating her as the dance of two camps. Do we know how many times she wrestled with the Lord? Do we know how many times she was required to obey Him? Do we know how much injustice she suffered? We should not admire her as if we were watching the dance of two camps.

THE EQUIPMENT OF THE WORKER

1. She Is the Prince’s Daughter

Then the Holy Spirit praises her. Chapter 7 begins, “How beautiful are your footsteps in sandals, O prince’s daughter!” According to Brother Nee, her being called a prince’s daughter refers to her being one of many in the royal household and speaks of her noble origin. Like a victor, she is manifested as a royal personage and is fully united with Christ.

2. She Preaches the Gospel

The Spirit first praises her footsteps. In the Bible, footsteps are related to the work of the gospel. Here the Spirit describes her as wearing the shoes of the gospel. She must be always walking. Her footsteps indicate that she is a serving one. How beautiful is her preaching of the gospel!

3. She Has the Power to Stand

Then it is said of her, “Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilled artist.” Her thighs refer to her power to stand. Her standing before God comes entirely from God’s sculpting and His work upon her. Here the Lord refers to Himself as a skilled artist as He tells the maiden, “I will work in you as a skilled artist until you are able to stand as one transformed in My life.”

4. She Has Power in Faith

This portion continues, “Your navel is a round goblet that never lacks mixed wine; your belly is a heap of wheat, fenced in by lilies.” The navel and belly refer to the maiden’s inner being, and mixed wine refers to the life that the Holy Spirit gives her by means of the Lord’s shed blood. She not only has experienced but also has been constituted with the Lord’s redemption. It has become her reality and her portion.

Moreover, her belly is a heap of wheat, not a grain of wheat! A grain of wheat refers to the Lord Jesus and His death. A heap of wheat refers to her experiencing the work of the Lord and having His life supply. She not only experiences the Lord’s redemption but also is full of the experience of His resurrection. She experiences resurrection in many ways. Her words and behavior issue from the work of the Lord’s resurrection. Death holds no sway over her when she moves and works, nor will discouragement, anger, or intolerance. She manifests the condition of being in resurrection.

Although she might experience death in a variety of environments, and although death's billows often threaten to swallow her up, she is still able to stand, because she is "fenced in by lilies." She realizes that she needs to look to the Lord in faith. We should worry for nothing, since the Lord cares for us. She has faith and the power in faith so that she can go forward.

5. She Has the Ability to Feed Others

In verse 3 the Spirit continues, "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle." Now she is full of life, and she is able to feed others. Her two breasts indicate her capacity and ability to feed others.

6. Her Suffering Is for the Accomplishment of God's Purpose

Then it is said of her, "Your neck is like a tower of ivory." This time her neck is not like the tower of David, but a tower of ivory. This indicates that she has been dealt with by God. When she stands for God, she is as strong as a tower in her union with Him. In nothing will she disobey. The maiden and the Lord are joined as one in all her purposes. Indeed, she has experienced the work of the Lord and the work of the Spirit.

7. She Is Purely and Simply for the Lord

He also says, "Your eyes, like the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim." Her eyes are like a pool here, not a flowing spring. Being quiet and stable, a pool is open to the light and reflective. This tells us that her eyes reflect the Lord. She is also quiet and restful before God. Her heart is pure and simple towards Him. "Heshbon" means intelligent, while "Bath-rabbim" means the daughters of many. Now she is an intelligent person.

8. She Has Spiritual Discernment

The praise continues, “Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces Damascus.” Only those possessing maturity have a spiritual sense of smell. Those whose experiences are shallow lack a spiritual sense of smell. If you have a spiritual “nose,” you will easily “smell” others’ feelings and be able to discern their intentions through their words.

“The tower of Lebanon” is heavenly, tall, upright, and facing Damascus. Therefore, her nose is heavenly, and it can identify a person’s flesh, temper, or deceit. She can discern others’ spirit, feelings, or inner condition.

9. Her Heart Is One with God

In verse 5 it is said of her, “Your head upon you is like Carmel.” Mount Carmel is where Elijah demonstrated his power before the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). Elijah built an altar there and dug a trench around it. Then he filled four barrels with water and poured it on the sacrifice, upon which God sent fire from heaven. There he slew the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Afterwards he prayed asking Jehovah for rain in the midst of drought, and it rained mightily. Hence, Elijah was a man of victory and prayer. Like Elijah, the maiden’s heart is one with God. She is victorious, and God answers all her prayers.

10. She Gains the Kingship and Captures the Lord’s Heart through Her Obedience

Then the Shulammitte is told, “And the locks of your head like purple. The king is fettered by your tresses.” She reigns. Moreover, the king is fettered by her tresses. Her obedience brings in her kingship. Originally, her locks reposed like goats upon Mount Gilead. Now, she and the Lord are so united that we can’t tell who submits to whom. As a matter of fact, the Lord and she obey each other. The Lord’s heart is captured and fettered by her.

THE LORD'S INSERTED WORDS

1. Her Stature and Capacity of Life

Verses 6 through 11 are the Lord's praise for her. He says, "How beautiful and how pleasant in delights you are, O love! This your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like the clusters." Her stature's being like the palm tree indicates that she has reached the full stature of Christ and capacity of life. Palm trees are rooted in water, and their upper part is straight and green. Hence, she has grown up and has become mature. She is tall and straight, at the full stature of Christ. Again, her two breasts denote her maturity. They are like clusters, which means that she is able to supply others' needs according to her mature capacity in life.

2. Her Desirability

In verse 8 the Lord says, "I said, I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its branches." Here the Lord seemingly says, "In the past, it was you who sought and pursued Me. You held me and would not let Me go. Now, I want to come to you and take hold of your branches. I will take hold of you and fellowship with you."

3. The Fragrance of Her Nose and the Roof of Her Mouth

The following verses state, "And the fragrance of your nose like apples, and the roof of your mouth like the best wine." Apples here refer to the Lord Himself. She has enjoyed the Lord to the extent that she gives forth the fragrance of the Lord. In this regard, she is really like Him.

The best wine refers to the wine of the millennium (Matt. 26:29). It gives the Lord the best joy. Just as the Lord's words changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:5-10), her words are full of the Lord's working. They are a masterpiece sculpted by the Spirit, and they make the Lord joyful.

THE MAIDEN'S REPLY

Then the maiden is satisfied, and she continues, "Going down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who sleep." She means that after the Lord's working upon her, she has been turned from water into the best wine. This wine was for Him and for His enjoyment. Because of her union with the Lord, the wine went down smoothly for her Beloved.

Moreover, it glided through the lips of those who sleep. The sleeping ones are those who have lost consciousness of themselves and are only living to God. They are in the same position as the Beloved. Wine not only satisfies but also refreshes us. Hence, besides satisfying the Lord, she also refreshes those who share the Lord's position.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE LORD

1. The Characteristics of a Servant of the Lord

How should we truly serve the Lord? In Song of Songs 7:1-9, there are nine characteristics a believer should remember. First, a healthy servant must be full of movement. He puts on the shoes of the gospel and walks with beautiful footsteps. Second, he must have the power to stand. His rounded thighs should be like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilled artist. Third, he should have rich experiences and equipping. His navel is a round goblet that never lacks mixed wine, and his belly is a heap of wheat fenced in by lilies. Fourth, he must be full of life. His two breasts should be like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Fifth, his neck needs to be like a tower of ivory. He has experienced the work of the Lord. As he stands for Him, he captures the Lord's heart, and he is a work sculpted by God. Then sixth, his eyes should be like a pool. His pure heart and his love reflect the Lord. Seventh, he has a spiritual intuition. He is able to differentiate between good and bad through a spiritual sense of smell. The eighth item is that his head is like Carmel. Finally, he has the stature of the fullness of Christ. His hair

is purple, and it fetters the Lord.

Only those who have these characteristics can serve the Lord in a healthy way. Although we may not be perfect like the maiden, we still need to serve in life. We should preach the gospel and stand for the Lord. We need to experience the work of God and love Him purely according to our spiritual intuition. If we want to serve Him, we should be ready for spiritual warfare and focus on our growth in Christ.

2. “I Am My Beloved’s”

The Shulammitte testifies in verse 10, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.” Now she only cares for the Lord’s desire rather than her own pleasure. She exists for the purpose of satisfying His desire. Her satisfaction no longer is rooted in her gain, her loss, or her work; it is now found only in the Lord’s desire towards her.

3. The Initiation of Work

a. “Let Us Go Forth into the Fields”

From this point, the Lord and His seeker work together, for now the seeker says, “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields” (v. 11). In the following verses, we see their fellowship in the work. Since the union between the maiden and the Lord is now so absolute, she can now speak to the Lord and even initiate the work.

First she says, “Let us go forth into the fields.” This is different from chapter 1, in which she said, “They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where do you pasture your flock? Where do you make it lie down at noon?” At that time, she focused only upon the little work in her hand. But now she can say, “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields.”

The fields refer to the world. In the book of Matthew, there is a clear picture of the field. When she says, “Let us go forth into the

fields,” she doesn’t mean she wants to love the world. She means that the whole world is the sphere of her work. She is enlarged because the Lord has worked in her. She has been delivered from her own work and her own feelings. She realizes that the Lord’s work is upon the whole earth.

b. “Let Us Lodge in the Villages”

Then she says, “Let us lodge in the villages.” She also sees that there are many villages in the world where she can serve. She shares the same heart with the Lord and she cooperates with Him. It seems that she has a universal view. Her vision, her desire, and her hope are on the same level as the Lord’s. Her capacity is so broad that she can say, “Let us lodge in the villages.”

This statement also indicates that she realizes she is just a sojourner in this world. She cannot be confined to one place, taking care of just some certain ones, nor can she only focus on some certain matters. To her, every place has something for the Lord to work upon and gain. Now she can become a blessing to the church wherever she goes.

Here we see that her view is far-reaching, and her understanding is broad. However, in her depths, she doesn’t want to be at work. Instead, she would rather be in love with the Lord. Her feeling is that there is no village that belongs to her. She works from one village to another and is not confined to any particular one. There is neither a work nor a place that belongs to her. She has nothing of her own.

Like her, we also serve the Lord in a wandering and sojourning way. If the Lord asks us to do something, we should do it with Him in love. We lodge, rest, and enjoy the work together with Him. We can see how closely the maiden’s heart is united with the Lord’s. She only cares for Him. Although she has the entire earth in view, her heart is set on the Lord. She feels that without Him, nothing is accomplished and all is vain. She would never sacrifice her relationship with Him for a certain work or need. Her desire is that the Lord would come with her.

This is a picture of normal service—“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.” We lodge in the villages with Him. We should tell Him, “Lord, the work is Yours, and so is the need. Come; let us lodge in any place. You have a way and You are free to work in any place.” What a wonderful relationship the maiden has with the Lord! She doesn’t focus on the effectiveness of her work, but on the Lord Himself.

Why are there so many problems in our service today? They are due to the fact that we focus on work. If you turn to the Lord and only love Him, you will find it simple to serve and work. We should be deeply united with the Lord and only focus on having a close relationship with Him, rather than on doing a good job. Our victory should be in our relationship with Him, not in our work.

When you love the Lord in this way and His desire is for you, you will see the real need as you lift up your eyes and look at the field. All work is meaningless if it does not issue from the Lord and His love. We need to tell the Lord as we serve, “Lord, we must lodge together in the villages. I cannot go without You.”

A person who knows how to serve the Lord surely has a view of the field. To work in the field is a principle. Then when we work in the field, our consecration will be absolute and we will hold nothing in our hands. If we love the Lord in simplicity, we will know that we are just lodging in the villages with our Beloved today. Without the Lord’s leading, we will not go forth elsewhere.

c. “Let Us Rise Up Early for the Vineyards”

The Shulammitte then says, “Let us rise up early for the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, if the blossom is open, if the pomegranates are in bloom; there I will give you my love.” This is still a story of love. Here the vineyards are plural in number. Because she loves the Lord, she no longer cares for her own vineyard, but for the Lord’s vineyards. The work of the Lord has become her work.

Then she says, “Let us see if the vine has budded, if the blossom is open, if the pomegranates are in bloom; there I will give you

my love.” This indicates that she is very diligent. She always moves with the work of the Lord. When He moves, she also moves. She is always watching for the signs of life.

Grapes and pomegranates are both fruits that refer to the richness of life. The budding of the vine and the blooming of the pomegranates are indications of fruit bearing. Before the fruit comes forth, there are certain signs. This reveals that when she cares for others, she doesn't focus on numbers, but on the signs of life. She labors diligently according to the manifestation of life.

We all like to look for fruit. However, the real servant looks for the budding of the vine. He is not restricted, but very free. He comes to one field today and goes to another one tomorrow. He knows that where there is budding and blossoming, there life is operating, and fruit will issue forth. The Lord is responsible for the fruit bearing, whereas we are responsible for the feeding in life. We plant and water, but it is the Lord who causes the growth.

In our service, we should simply bring others into life. We need to treasure people who are in life rather than the outward success of work.

d. “There I Will Give You My Love”

She says, “There I will give you my love.” What a wonderful statement! Even though she supplies life and carefully watches for the budding of the vine and the blooming of the pomegranates, her purpose is only to love her Lord. She only desires a deeper union with Him.

e. The Result of Work

Verse 13 says, “The mandrakes give forth fragrance.” Leah hired Jacob from Rachel for one night with mandrakes (Gen. 30:14-16). Hence, it is a plant of love. It signifies the union between husband and wife. The fragrance here is given forth from the love in the union with the Lord.

f. “Over Our Doors Are All Choice Fruits”

The Lord’s lover continues, “And over our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old. These, my beloved, I have stored up for you.” She realizes that she has had many fruits in her life, and she has stored up all the choice fruits over the door for the Lord to enjoy. “Our doors” are the places where the seeker and the Lord go in or go out. Whether the fruits are those borne in the past or in the present, they are for Him. She has stored up the result of her labor only for the Lord’s enjoyment, not for her own.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 7

In chapter 7 we see three conditions that a healthy servant of the Lord should manifest:

The first condition is that his attitude is simple and that he can initiate work. (“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; let us lodge in the villages.”) Wherever he may be, he is but a sojourner who moves and lives with the Lord. Also, he is delivered from work and is enlarged by the Lord. Wherever he goes, there is a village where the Lord can lodge. There he gives his love to Him. He no longer feels, “My own vineyard I have not kept.” He is willing to fully cooperate with the Lord and cares only for His vineyards. If the whole world is the sphere of the Lord’s work, it is his also.

The second condition is that he labors diligently and focuses on life. (“Let us rise up early for the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, if the blossom is open, if the pomegranates are in bloom.”) He cares for the Lord’s desire and work. When the Lord leads, he follows immediately. If the Lord goes forward, he will just follow. He is a diligent man.

He is not only diligent, but he is also in a deep union with the Lord. He knows what the Lord wants, and he is clear about the Lord’s burden. He doesn’t grope along on his own, but closely follows the Lord’s leading.

When he labors, he focuses on whether the vine has budded or

the pomegranates are in bloom. He feels that it doesn't matter how many grapes and pomegranates there are; what matters is the flowing of the Lord's life and whether others are touching life. He only cares whether people are enjoying and experiencing life. In his labor, grapes are not as important as the vine's budding, and pomegranates are not as important as the blossoming.

Brothers and sisters, it is foolish just to focus on the number of attendants in a meeting. The Lord's worker should focus on the vine's budding and the pomegranates' blooming. If there is budding and blossoming, there will naturally be a harvest of fruit.

The third condition is that his harvest of fruit is for the Lord. ("And over our doors are all choice fruits, . . . stored up for you.") Although he is very fruitful, none of the fruit he gains is for himself. He consecrates the result of his labor to the Lord. It is for the Lord's enjoyment. He has grown out of being for his own enjoyment into caring only for the Lord's satisfaction. What he cares about now is whether or not the Lord is satisfied; he no longer has his own gain in view. His vision matches that of the Lord, because he has matured. He follows the Lord's feeling as he rises up early in the morning. The result of his work fulfills the Lord's desire and is fully for His enjoyment. As he lives in this condition, others will praise him, and so will the Lord. While he lives before God in this way, he and the Lord will never grow apart.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE AWAITING

“O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother’s breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into my mother’s house, who has instructed me; I would make you drink spiced wine from the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand would be under my head, and his right hand would embrace me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not rouse up or awaken my love until she pleases. Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? I awakened you under the apple tree: there your mother was in labor with you; there she was in labor and brought you forth. Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy is as cruel as Sheol; its flashes are the flashes of fire, a flame of Jehovah. Many waters cannot quench love, nor do floods drown it. If a man gave all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly despised. We have a little sister, and she has no breasts: what shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of sil-

ver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers; then I was in his eyes like one who has found peace. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon: he let out the vineyard to keepers; each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me. You will have the thousand, O Solomon; and those who keep its fruit, two hundred. O you who dwell in the gardens, my companions listen for your voice; let me hear it. Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”
(*Song of Songs 8:1-14*)

THE LIMITATION OF THE FLESH

It seems to us that the experience of a saved one should conclude with chapter seven, for in that chapter the maiden reaches the highest peak she could possibly reach. She is altogether beautiful. Everyone praises her as one who looks forth like the dawn and is as beautiful as the moon, as clear as the sun, and as terrible as an army with banners. In both God’s eyes and man’s, she is matured. From the standpoint of her experience, she enjoys total oneness with the Lord. She has indeed become someone who satisfies the Lord.

However, in spite of all this, she says, “O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother’s breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me” (8:1). To her own feeling, she is despised and despicable. Only someone who has reached the highest peak of spiritual experience, who is in complete union with the Lord and so satisfying to Him, experiences this kind of feeling. She considers herself despised, for she is still in “the body of our humiliation” (Phil. 3:21). To her feeling there is still something short, and she is unworthy to stand before Him. It seems to her that everyone—the Lord, the brothers and sisters, and Sa-

tan—will find her loathsome as long as she remains on the earth, for she still possesses weaknesses and limitations that prevent her from being like her grand and glorious Christ.

“O THAT YOU WERE LIKE A BROTHER TO ME!”

Those who reach this stage are painfully aware of their failure and weakness before the Lord, but they have no choice but to wait until the Lord’s return, when their situation can be remedied. Here the Lord’s seeker laments, “O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother’s breasts!” Her thought is that if they had the same mother, then in every way she could be like the One she loves, for then they would share the same life. Although the seeking one actually does have the life of the Lord, she feels that she still does not match Him—she still experiences weakness, bondage, limitation, and shortcomings, while the Lord is so perfect, holy, strong, free, glorious, and grand. He lives completely for God’s purpose. Although the Lord praises her, she groans that she is only to be despised.

Everyone praises her riches, and even the Lord praises her perfection. Yet in spite of all her glorious experience of knowing the Lord and the work of the cross all these years, she still feels loathsome. There is a groaning deep within her, “I have Your presence, I know the secret to being an overcomer, and I live in fellowship with You, yet I long for the redemption of my body. Until I am transfigured, I cannot match You. O that You were like a brother to me! I want to be like You and to be in the glory together with You.”

Brothers and sisters, perhaps you have had this experience. As you were enjoying the height of sweetness in your fellowship with the Lord, you realized the frustration and barrier of the flesh. In such a state one sighs and tells the Lord, “How I long to be delivered from the power of self and from the law of sin! I would like to experience complete union with You. I desire that the body of my humiliation would be transfigured that I might be conformed to the body of Your glory.”

This is the meaning of her saying, “O that you were like a brother

to me!” This statement appears in this book only once. At the beginning, she pursued spiritual things. She desired to be victorious and experienced in the things of the Lord. Having gained these, she only desired to gain the Lord Himself. Now that she has gained Him, she yearns for the redemption of the body. She desires to be as free as the Lord, released from all that is negative. She desires that the holiness of the Lord would become her holiness. She has only one desire: that none would despise her, including, in particular, herself. She despises herself and desires transfiguration. Therefore she longs for the Lord’s coming, for His coming will solve all her problems.

Is she not in victory? She has triumphed. Has she not experienced the cross? She has deeply experienced the working of the cross. Does she know the Lord? She knows Him intimately. All this, however, cannot prevent her from lamenting, “Lord, I have followed You now for so many years, and people consider me a spiritually mature person. Even You appraise me as being someone who is mature before You. However, deep within me, I feel I am despicable. How I long for the redemption of my body!”

“I WOULD KISS YOU”

She then exclaims, “If I found you outside, I would kiss you.” In the beginning, she asked the Lord to kiss her (1:2). Here she desires to kiss Him instead. In chapter 1, she cared for no one but herself, whereas in chapter 8, she belongs to the Lord completely. She has learned the secret in everything and in all things and is able to express her love to the Lord in every circumstance.

“INTO MY MOTHER’S HOUSE”

The Shulammite then says, “I would lead you and bring you into my mother’s house, who has instructed me” (8:2). This is what she desires to do when the Lord comes back, when she has been delivered from the body of her humiliation. Her thought does not focus on herself. She will not say on that day, “Hallelujah! I am transfig-

ured! There is no more self, no more sin, no more sorrow, and no more death. Everything is new!” On the contrary, her thoughts are solely upon the Lord and how she will come to Him at that time. When I come to this part, I am deeply moved.

In chapter 7, we can see that this person has come to love the Lord with her whole heart, her whole soul, her whole mind, and her whole strength. She invites the Lord to the village and gives Him her love in the fields. In eternity, her love for the Lord will remain unchanged. “I would lead you and bring you into my mother’s house.” Her mother’s house here typifies grace. She has the feeling, “O Lord, in this evil generation, You have chosen me, loved me, and given Yourself to me. When I recount all my experiences of grace, I fully appreciate that my life has been full of Your love and the work of grace. I am but a sinner saved by grace. I would lead You to enjoy Your grace in me.”

“WHO WOULD INSTRUCT ME”

According to the King James Version, verse 2 is translated, “I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother’s house, who would instruct me.” When she began to pursue the Lord, she asked the Lord to bring her into His chambers in order that she might know her real situation. Here she leads the Lord into her mother’s house so that she might be instructed to know the grace of God.

Although she has known the Lord in the present age, she does not yet feel that she knows Him in full. Even in eternity she intends to be instructed in order that she might fully know Him as she is fully known (1 Cor. 13:12). She asks the Lord to reveal Himself further to her so that in the eternal ages she might fully possess the knowledge of His grace.

“I WOULD MAKE YOU DRINK SPICED WINE”

This verse continues, “I would make you drink spiced wine from the juice of my pomegranate.” She seems to be saying, “Lord, I will love You for eternity. I will also exhibit the work of Your cross

that You might be satisfied.” As one who has followed the Lord on the earth in this age, she has received the Lord’s supply of “spices.” In eternity, she would like to exhibit the work of the Lord’s cross—the myrrh and frankincense and the fragrant powders of the merchant—for the Lord’s satisfaction. She makes spiced wine from her stores of experience to satisfy Him.

At that time, she will not only enter into rest, but also bring the Lord into a union of love to enjoy the spiced wine from her life. This is the crystallization of all her experience of the cross. All that she has experienced will be presented to the Lord for His enjoyment.

“HIS RIGHT HAND WOULD EMBRACE ME”

The Shulammitte then says, “His left hand would be under my head, and his right hand would embrace me.” In chapter 2, she also had such face-to-face fellowship with the Lord (2:6). That experience was in her spirit. Now she testifies that she will fellowship with Him physically in that day when there will be nothing to separate them. She will enjoy unclouded union with the Lord forever. Never again will she experience being apart from Him, once she has experienced the final stage of the Lord’s redemptive work, the redemption of the body.

“I ADJURE YOU, O DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM”

Verse 4 says, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not rouse up or awaken my love until she pleases.” Previously the Lord said, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the fields, not to rouse up or awaken my love” (2:7). At that time, the maiden was leery of what the Lord had planned for her. Like a gazelle or a hind, she was easily startled away. Now she is experienced. She is unaffected by her environment and no longer reacts to things that were once “false alarms.” Therefore the Lord says, “Do not rouse her up while she is living in hope of My return.” Since she lives by awaiting the Lord’s coming

and in the hope of the redemption of the body, she is in the last stage of the experience of life. “While she is in this final stage,” says the Lord, “let her be like one who is waiting for My coming, and do not divert her.”

**THE DELIVERANCE FROM THE FLESH
AND THE SOUL LIFE**

Here the saints ask again, “Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?” They asked in chapter 3, “Who is she who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?” At that time, people admired her manifestation, for she was full of the power of the Spirit and bore the evidence of the work of the cross. Here, she no longer has much manifestation; she is simply like one who comes up from the wilderness, nothing more.

The wilderness here refers not only to the world, but also to the flesh and the soul life. Her coming up from the wilderness reveals that she has overcome her flesh and soul life and lives absolutely in the fullness of the Spirit. She doesn’t merely manifest the marks of God’s work; she is indeed a spiritual person and lives in the heavenly realm. When people see her, they know she is completely separated unto the Lord.

In the Old Testament, Egypt signifies the flesh, the wilderness signifies the soul life, and the good land signifies the spirit. Here the Lord’s lover is coming up from the wilderness. She has been delivered from her soul life as well as her flesh. Her soul life can no longer hinder her. She doesn’t live in her mind, in her emotion, or in her will. She lives in the spirit and in union with the Lord. Seeing this, those acquainted with her are prompted to ask, “Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?”

LIVING IN LOVE AND GRACE

The Lord then says, “I awakened you under the apple tree” (8:5). He seems to be saying, “Do not leave your first love. When you began to follow Me, your soul was awakened, and in My shade you delighted and sat down. My fruit was sweet to your taste (2:3). You were awakened to depart from sinful things and from religion. I roused you up in My shade with the fruit of My love. Now I want to remind you, do not leave your first love. You cannot be spiritual to the extent that you cease to love Me. You cannot leave your first love while you are waiting for My coming. Just as you first loved Me and were attracted by My love, in the same manner you have to love Me and be attracted by My love all your life.”

No matter how high or how deep our spiritual experience becomes, we can never depart from our love relationship with the Lord. In this book, the love between the maiden and her Beloved never fails. Whenever you touch the Lord, you touch love. It is as the hymnist wrote, “To bring thee to thy God, love takes the shortest route” (*Hymns*, #477). If you desire to follow Him, if you desire to be an overcomer, and if you desire a deeper knowledge of the truth, then all your pursuing must be in the sphere of love.

The Lord continues, “There your mother was in labor with you; there she was in labor and brought you forth.” These words are so excellent! Your mother was in labor with you. She delivered you and brought you up. It was love that awakened you and led you. It is grace (symbolized by the mother) that has followed you all your life. Grace is laboring over you, working to bring you forth. You began to follow the Lord because of love. Now you must continue to live in grace and enjoy His love. The way of grace and love must be with you to the end. This is so wonderful, yet so simple.

How will your life proceed? Grace will be in labor with you all your life. You will experience victory through the support and the supply of grace. This becomes the testimony and characteristic of the experienced believer.

This one-year training is coming to an end, and you all are considering your own future as well as the future of the church. Our

mind is so clear as we consider all the issues and options. However, when our mind is so clear, love begins to fade. The way seems obvious, yet the experience of love disappears. No wonder the Lord reminds His seeker at the conclusion of this book, “Don’t forget how I awakened you under the apple tree. Don’t forget My banner over you, which is love. Don’t depart from love. You have to live in love all the time. Grace will be with you.”

Brothers and sisters, we all will carry a heavy load as we are serving. It is true that the more you love the Lord, the heavier the burden will be. However, you have to tell the Lord as you are serving, “O Lord, the basis of my serving is love. I give the fruit of my labor to You because I love You.” You must abide in the freshness of this love forever.

Love is the motive of our journey. Sometimes a saint grows very quickly when he just gets saved, and then gradually his growth slows and eventually stops. I am sometimes surprised to see a desirous brother remain the same after ten years in the church life. The reason this happens is because of a problem with his love towards the Lord. It seems that he is for the Lord, but there is no love, only service. Apart from love, there is no grace. As a result, many good brothers and sisters remain unchanged even after many years.

It is necessary for the church to recover its first love, but we have to demand this of ourselves before we seek it in others. The Lord will lead you after this training into some area of service. No matter where you go, you must tell Him, “Lord, I want to be one who loves You all the time.” You can never depart from this. Then, regardless of how difficult things may become, you will be secure in your relationship of love with the Lord. You will neither fear nor worry, for you will be solely responsible to the Lord, and He will be responsible for you. In this relationship, grace will be “in labor” with you, work for you, and be your support on your journey. You have to live in love.

When we consider our future before the Lord, the first priority is to keep our first love for Him fresh. If there is a problem with our love, all our labor will be in vain. If there is a problem with our love,

we will find that nothing else in our lives is worthwhile. The Lord will render you a higher leading, a deeper dealing, or a stronger wounding in the future that you may find difficult to understand or tolerate. You may need to pay the price of tears and blood. Nevertheless you have to be able to tell Him, “Lord, You know I love You.” As a result, you will experience grace and discover that all things truly work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

HOPING IN THE LOVE AND POWER OF THE LORD

After the Lord speaks to her in this way, the Shulammitte responds, “Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death” (8:6). The heart is where love resides. She seems to be saying, “You have reminded me that it was You who awakened me under the apple tree. I want to remind You in return that I am the one on Your heart. You have to love me and set me as a seal on Your heart so that there is no possibility that I could ever be blotted out. I would also like to remind You that I am weak. Therefore, You have to set me as a seal on Your arm. Please shelter me, support me, and preserve me with Your power. It is my earnest desire to continue forever in this union with You and never to depart from You.”

1. “Love Is As Strong As Death”

The word tells us here, “Love is as strong as death.” The strongest thing on earth is death. When death comes, no one can withstand it or overpower it. There are many in history who have sought to escape death, but regardless of how powerful or wealthy they were, death took every one of them. Since death is so strong, the maiden tells the Lord, “I trust that the love between us is as strong as death. Since that is the case, nothing will be able to shake it.”

2. “Jealousy Is As Cruel As Sheol”

We are also told, “Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol.” Jealousy accompanies love, and if jealousy is not present, perhaps that love is not true. She seems to be saying, “Lord, You love me so much, and I know You are jealous over me. I want you to be jealous over me to the uttermost. If I am not faithful, or if my yearning turns from You to something else, or if my love begins to fade, please deal with me cruelly. Purge every other thing away in Your jealousy.” She loves the Lord to the extent that she doesn’t mind the Lord’s severe dealings as long as they are carried out in His jealousy over her. Her fear is that her heart might incline itself towards something other than the Lord, so she asks that the Lord’s jealousy might become her insurance against this.

3. “A Flame of Jehovah”

The Shulammitte tells us that the Lord’s jealousy flashes with fire and is a flame of Jehovah (8:6). Fire comes to enlighten and to kill. In the past, you might have been able to love a lot of things besides the Lord without feeling anything about it. When the Lord flashes forth in the fire of His jealousy, however, you have to bow down before Him and allow Him to take away whatever else is occupying your heart. If the Lord is not jealous over you, His fire will not come to you, and you can continue loving the world untroubled. How poor is the person in this situation! In the eyes of the Lord, this one is not the Shulammitte who ravishes His heart, but merely one of the daughters of Jerusalem.

Because she loves the Lord so much and gives herself unreservedly to the Lord, He is full of jealousy over her. She asks that the Lord would not let her go, and that the Lord’s Spirit of jealousy would continue to work in her life to insure that she would never love anything other than Him. Therefore she even asks for the flashes of the Lord’s fire to enlighten her, to kill the dross of base desire, to crush any idol, and to burn up anything that is not of Him or His love.

4. “Many Waters Cannot Quench Love”

Then she says, “Many waters cannot quench love, nor do floods drown it” (8:7). When Jonah was in the stomach of the fish, he cried out, “Water encompassed me, even to my soul; the deep surrounded me” (Jonah 2:5). Therefore, “many waters” and “floods” signify trials.

When we have a relationship of love with the Lord, tribulation and trials may surround us, but they will not hinder us. Neither trials (symbolized by many waters) nor persecutions (typified by floods) will be able to separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35-39). We just love Him.

5. Nothing Can Be Exchanged for His Love

The Shulammitte tells us further, “If a man gave all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly despised.” This is a word of experience. She desires only the love of the Lord. She has a lot of riches from her past experience with the Lord. She has experienced the Lord’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and her own labor has become very fruitful. She tells the Lord, however, “Even if I gave up all my previous precious experiences for this love, they would be utterly despised.”

Sometimes, when our relation with the Lord is not healthy, we want to give Him something to please Him. We might tell Him, “Lord, remember how I loved You for many years.” To this the Lord might answer, “If a man gave all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly despised. Don’t tell me how you loved Me before. Do you love Me now? If you do, there is no problem. If you don’t, even the love with which you loved Me 20 years ago is to be despised.” All our past experiences of Christ cannot take the place of our love for the Lord today.

How excellently does the Shulammitte describe this love! First, she beseeches the Lord to seal her in His heart, for she desires to be in His heart forever, and she asks that His power would cover

her so that her union with Him might be protected. She wishes that their love would be so strong that nothing might shake it. Then she asks that His jealousy might occupy her so that she would not love anyone but Him, and that the fire of His jealousy might enlighten her and cleanse her. She indeed knows the reality of love. She desires that nothing would ever threaten or compete for her heart's love towards the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we have to pray, "O Lord, don't let me go. Watch over me in Your jealousy. I would like to be Your prisoner of love." We should all be able to declare, "Trials and persecutions cannot hinder me from loving the Lord. His love will bring me through every trial and persecution." May we also tell the Lord, "If I were to give all the substance of my house for love, it would be utterly despised. I would like to live in Your fresh, new love."

CARING FOR THE YOUNG SAINTS

Following all this, the maiden declares, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts: what shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for" (8:8)? As one who is mature and experienced, she knows how to truly labor. Rather than caring about the number in the meetings, she cares for the saints' growth in life.

The Lord wants to gain every brother and sister to be His lover. We might ask Him, "Lord, these brothers and sisters are still in their flesh. They don't know the things of the Spirit. How can You gain them?" The mature ones, however, care about each person, not the work or the number. Those who know the Lord's heart continually are seeking the way for others to be personally gained by Christ.

This is the way of serving. No matter what position you have, or whether you are in the lead or not, you always have "little sisters" around you. You need to take care of them. Your service must bring them to the Lord, not yourself. You should care about whether the Lord is satisfied, not about taking up a position.

She answers her own question in the next verse: "If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door,

we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” A wall provides separation. A saved one should be separated from the world. A door provides passage. A normal Christian should be a wall on the one hand and a door on the other; he should be separated from the world and provide a way that the Lord can reach others. If someone has neither this wall nor this door, he probably has not yet been born again.

BUILDING UP THE SAINTS ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY HAVE

Perhaps this wall is not strong enough to resist the world; therefore she says, “If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver.” It is sweet that she says “we.” It is not she alone, but she and the Lord together who do the work of building.

She doesn’t bring the saints to follow her experiences step by step. Instead, she supplies others according to their need. Rather than expecting that others would experience things according to her spiritual history, she builds up the saints according to what they have. She supplies according to people’s need. However, what she supplies is from her own storehouse of experience.

She says she will build on the wall a battlement of silver. In other words, her experience of redemption (signified by silver) will become the experience of the little one. Initially, the wall was not very sturdy. After her building up the battlement, however, it is able to bear a testimony, and it becomes stable and firm.

In addition to separation, a wall also indicates building up. The Shulammite is willing to build her experience upon the experience of the others. She is not thinking of herself. All she has is for the building up of the church.

She continues, “If she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” The maiden manifests Christ’s humanity; therefore she can say, “I live for her protection.” She not only co-labors with the saints and supplies them, but also becomes their protector.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord not only desires that we love Him, pursue Him, and gain Him; He also desires that we would

take care of the saints who are younger than we are in life. If we mean business with Him, He will eventually lead us to say of others, “If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

When we see the brothers and sisters, we should be full of burden and feeling. We should sympathize with the Lord as well as the saints. When we grow to be mature and experienced, we will cease to care for our own enjoyment; instead we will be willing to pour out all we have for the need of the brothers and sisters. We will tell the Lord, “Lord, these brothers and sisters are still young. They haven’t grown up. However, You desire to gain them all. Lord, I am willing to carry out Your desire.”

You have passed through this one-year training. I am afraid that you still may care more for your own things than you do for “the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). The Lord needs some who are matured to co-labor with Him and perfect many “little sisters” for Him.

**“I WAS IN HIS EYES LIKE ONE
WHO HAS FOUND PEACE”**

The Shulammitte continues by saying, “I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers; then I was in his eyes like one who has found peace.” On the one hand, she is one who helps and blesses others. On the other hand, she is one who builds others up.

Towers are for watching and fighting, but breasts are for supplying life. With her breasts she can supply and nourish others, and she can also look out clearly over the fighting. As such a person, she can be built with others.

What does it mean when she says, “Then I was in his eyes like one who has found peace”? It means the more she serves, the more restful she is. What a wonderful thing such service is! It is not a burden, but an enjoyment. Brothers and sisters, we should all desire this kind of serving life.

WORKING FOR THE LORD

At this point we are told, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon: he let out the vineyard to keepers; each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.” The Lord’s work is mentioned here, for Solomon signifies the Lord Jesus, and Baal-hamon means “Lord of all.”

Solomon has a vineyard, which he leases out to keepers. This means that the fruit is for the keepers’ enjoyment. The price is 1,000 shekels. “A thousand” was also mentioned in 4:4, where we were told that the Shulammite’s neck was like a tower upon which 1,000 bucklers were hung. A thousand indicates that something is enough, or fulfilled. The Lord has a need. Through the vineyard that He leases out to us, we enjoy fruit to our satisfaction, and the Lord is fully satisfied through our enjoyment.

The maiden continues, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me. You will have the thousand, O Solomon; and those who keep its fruit, two hundred.” It is not that the Lord is asking for the thousand. She is the one who desires to give it. She seems to be telling Him, “Lord, I will give You what You want. I am for Your satisfaction.” It is no longer like a trade with a merchant. She is in love, and her life is for the Lord’s enjoyment. All her fragrant laboring is for His satisfaction.

Those who keep its fruit will have 200. In other words, those who labor with her will also be satisfied. She is a person co-laboring with others and building up the brothers and sisters in the church. Whosoever labors with her and is built up with her will share with her in the same enjoyment and satisfaction.

SEEKING TO HEAR HIS VOICE

Then the maiden declares, “O you who dwell in the gardens, my companions listen for your voice; let me hear it.” Here the “you” indicates the Lord. This is a deep experience. She doesn’t need to say anything, but only desires to listen to the Lord.

There seems to be nothing extraordinary or remarkable about

this statement. It is not like the high experiences of chapter 3 or chapter 5. She reached the high peak in chapter 7. People were impressed with her spirituality at that time. However, the Lord brings her back to live an ordinary life. He simply enjoins her not to leave her first love and to live all her life in grace. He leases out the vineyard to her for His satisfaction.

She feels that she is someone to be despised, and she longs for transfiguration. Before He returns, she reminds Him that she desires to be someone on His heart. She desires His power to cover her so that they are joined in a stronger union. She also asks that His jealousy would operate over her so that no trial or persecution might cause her love for Him to change. Although she has loved Him for many years, she desires the fresh experiences of His love, for she is not satisfied with the experiences and riches she has already acquired.

The maiden is so rich, yet so simple. She doesn't care for her own spirituality or the praise of others. She simply desires to be joined in love with the Lord and to live before Him. She co-labors with the Lord to carry out His desire, whether in the village or the field. She cares not for work, but for people. As others are perfected through her labor with the Lord, they are "the thousand shekels" for "Solomon"; they are for the Lord's satisfaction, and her co-workers are satisfied as well, for they keep the fruit and "two hundred." More than that, she is with others in the church listening for His voice. She is simply a member of the Body and enjoys the supply the Lord sends to the Body.

"MAKE HASTE, MY BELOVED"

At this time, regardless of how rich her life is or how deep her experience has become, she still cries out, "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices" (8:14).

She herself is a mountain of spices. The work of the Lord's cross upon her has become the ground for His return. The Lord can come back through her, as well as through many others who

have experienced the discipline of the Holy Spirit and the breaking of the cross. They have been through death and are in resurrection. They are completely sanctified and enjoy complete union with the Lord in love. Together their cry is, “Look, Lord. There are many mountains of spices on the earth. Make haste, Lord.”

CONCLUSION

I worship the Lord for this book. We may be common now, but the Lord will eventually make us all like the Shulammitte, who is just like Solomon, for “Shulammitte” is the feminine form of the name “Solomon.” The love of the Lord and the work of the Spirit pervade this book. We can be very slow in our response to follow and submit to the Lord, but He will not let us go, nor will He ever stop working on us.

Eventually He will lead us to such an extent that we will each have the same heart as He and will carry out the same work. We dwell in the freshness of His love as we await His return. May we all soon be able to join the chorus, “Make haste, my Beloved! Make haste, my Lord!”