



Foreword by Dr. Mark T. Barclay

**FOR THOSE IN DRY PLACES**  
*Hope for Ministers in the Wilderness*

**WILLIAM HARRISON PHARES**



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iUniverse, Inc.  
New York Bloomington

## **For Those in Dry Places Hope for Ministers in the Wilderness**

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*God Will Make A Way*

*Words and Music by Don Moen*

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*1663 Liberty Drive*

*Bloomington, IN 47403*

*www.iuniverse.com*

*1-800-Authors (1-800-288-4677)*

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*ISBN: 978-1-4502-4569-2 (pbk)*

*ISBN: 978-1-4502-4570-8 (ebk)*

*Library of Congress Control Number: 2010932797*

*Printed in the United States of America*

*iUniverse rev. date: 7/29/10*

*I am who I am today because of these men who have watered God's seed in me. I will be eternally grateful to*

*Rev. Dr. Robert A. Shelley, my spiritual father;*

*and Rev. Dr. Mark T. Barclay, my pastor.*

*My deepest appreciation to the faithful partners of*

*Stir the Fire Ministry.*

*My precious wife, Laura, has walked with me*

*each step of the way, and I will love and*

*cherish her forever.*



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# Foreword

I highly recommend Dr. William Phares' newest book, *For Those in Dry Places: Hope for Ministers in the Wilderness*, which comes to us in absolutely supreme timing. Many people today are going through dry, tough times and can hardly see light at the end of the tunnel. Dr. Phares addresses what to do when you are in this position—how to deal with your thoughts and what to do, day after day, to get out of your current difficult situation and stay out. All of us know the Lord is on our side, but we sometimes become discouraged when we don't see the manifested power of God working on our behalf.

Allow the Lord Jesus Christ to minister strength to your soul through the insight and inspiration you will find on these pages. When you are finished, hand it off to someone you know who is trying to find answers to their own life's problems. Better yet, purchase several copies to keep on hand to bless others as you minister to them. May the Lord's light shine upon your path, and may you find your way through the seasons of wilderness in your life.

I have known this author for many years and can vouch for not only his passion to study but his love for people, his pastor's heart, and his integrity. He and his wife, Laura, have ministered from God's pulpits for decades in many churches across America.

I call you blessed today!

Mark T. Barclay  
Preacher of Righteousness



# *Acknowledgments*

Music has always been dear to me. My family loved to sing, and I sang in choirs throughout my childhood. My wife and I were privileged to be a part of the Living Sound International ministry. We ministered with Don Moen, musical director for the organization. Not only is he a truly anointed song writer and worship leader, but he is also a genuine Christian. Each song Don has written has blessed my life but my favorite is “God Will Make a Way.” God makes a way when there seems to be no way! The words of this song are foundational to the theme of this book. I want to thank Don for being an instrument of the Lord.

## **God Will Make a Way**

Words and Music by Don Moen

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# *Introduction*

Is it possible to lead growing churches, be a missionary evangelist, and a faithful minister of the gospel, only to find yourself in a spiritual wilderness? By all outward appearances, I was successful and had a promising future. I thought I had finally arrived. Then almost overnight my life and ministry seemed to be ending.

For five years, I journeyed in a dry land. I am referring to a spiritual experience that is biblically known as a wilderness experience. Few people voluntarily choose to live in the wilderness. It is normally the place people pass through on their way to a destination. Spiritually, the wilderness can become the destination when one does not clearly observe the warning signs along the road. Discouragement, depression, and deception are written on these signs. In my journey as a minister of the gospel I have observed and experienced them. I want to explore the steps that cause a minister to occupy rather than pass through a spiritually dry place in life and ministry.

The first spiritual road sign warning of an approaching dry place is discouragement. *No courage* describes a person who is not experiencing courage or who has moved away from courage. It also could mean one who had courage but did an about-face. Something or some things happened and the minister stopped moving forward in courage and turned in the opposite direction.

Depression is the second sign. Elijah experienced it. Other biblical characters are recorded as having suffered depression in their ministry. Today depression is common, and television commercials tout numerous medications to treat it. One commercial describes a prescription that helps sufferers when the medication they are now taking is not enough. Hope deferred may be the root cause of most depression, especially for those in ministries. The Bible says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12). Disappointments often come in ministry. Measuring success is elusive for a minister: promises are not kept, people let you down, leaders pass you over for someone else, and promotions are delayed. These things affect one’s hope. When they continue to recur, hope is deferred, and the heart becomes sick. This is another way to describe depression.

Deception is the last road sign. Deception is defined as “fraud, double-dealing, subterfuge, trickery.” Deception is found in all walks of life and even in churches.

The synonyms for *deception* read like descriptions of the Mafia desiring to do away with someone. Christians would never use double-dealing or subterfuge in the church, right? Don’t kid yourself! I wish that were not true, but pastors who have been blindsided by church politics know better. Deception hurts deeply because it seems to come out of nowhere and often from trusted members. A well-known pastor in England calls these church members the “church mafia.” Marshall Shelley, in his book by the same title, refers to them as *Well-Intentioned Dragons*. The subtitle, *Ministering to Problem People in the Church*,<sup>1</sup> is the ideal goal for ministers affected by them, but as is often the case, the “dragons”

strike a deadly blow first. What was once a fruitful and productive ministry is now nothing more than a dry place. *Confidence, trust,* and *faithfulness* became barren, lifeless words.

Out of my experiences, I write to those in dry places or those who feel they are on a wilderness journey. I have passed through these desert regions more than once in my life. You may feel isolated, alienated, lonely, and misunderstood. Perhaps you are the pastor of a high-steeple church or serving in a rural parish. You may be on the mission field or a military chaplain. You may feel you have been climbing the ladder of success only to find it leaning against the wrong wall.

Arriving in the dry place can happen suddenly or over a long period of time. A crisis could trigger it. An unexpected event could lead to it. Moral sins definitely lead to dryness. Many times it occurs after a great loss. The loss of a job, the death of a loved one, and the loss of one's health are just a few of the ways we experience loss. These usually come without warning. Finding oneself in the dry place can also happen gradually over a long period of time. No one sets out to live in the wilderness. There has to be a way out!

Even with all the negative aspects of spiritual dryness there are gifts that come out of the experience. The greatest gift the desert place gives is the possibility of new direction and purpose. It is possible to find true north. In the wilderness, we can learn to hear God's voice in a clearer way. When the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, a dramatic event happened to him after his time of testing. In Matthew 4:11b, "angels came and began to minister to him." We are not lost when we are in the desert place. The Great

Shepherd knows where we are and sends angels to care for us. The desert places teach us that we are survivors, and that if we can make it through this, we can make it through anything.

My path out of the wilderness took a turn I did not expect. For three years, I served as a hospice chaplain. This gave me deeper compassion for those who suffer. Most hospice patients recognize the valley of the shadow of death. I chose to be one of their companions in their journey. I know the difference between dying and living, as well as hopelessness and hope. I can lead you to hope and life. After this special time of God's training I am back in the pastorate. From all my experiences in ministry, I come to this place.

It is my prayer that you will allow me to companion you through your dry place. I hope I can become your guide to *shalom*, the peace and completeness of God. I pray that the Holy Spirit will rain on your desert and that your well will spring forth again!

I have used the pronouns, he and she throughout the book when referring to ministers and pastors. I have alternated their use in no particular order. When referring to God, the masculine pronoun has been used.

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## Chapter 1

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### *Prone to Wander*

Ministers are spiritual guides leading God’s people. The biblical model for this ministry is that of a shepherd. Shepherds have the task of feeding the flock and guiding it to still waters to drink. Shepherds have a lonely job but an important responsibility. If a shepherd fails to lead properly, the sheep are scattered and die. Isaiah 53:6 reads, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” Sheep will wander if left to their own way. The irony of being a shepherd called by the Great Shepherd is that ministers have the same potential to wander. We too are sheep of God’s fold. A pastor is also one of God’s sheep, but because of God’s calling, the pastor is *over* the sheep. This authority is *under* the leadership of Jesus, the Great Shepherd of our soul. The Apostle Peter writes instructions to pastors in 1 Peter 5:1–3:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings

of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, *shepherd the flock of God* among you, *exercising oversight* not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (emphasis added)

The Apostle Paul wrote instructions to Christians about their relationship to pastors:

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and *have charge over you in the Lord* and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, emphasis added).

In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul once again exhorts the congregation: “*The elders who rule well* are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (emphasis added). Scripture is clear about the responsibilities of an elder (pastor) when it uses the words *shepherd*, *oversight*, *rule*, and *work hard at preaching and teaching*. It also is clear about the response of the congregation when it uses verbs such as *appreciate*, *charge over you in the Lord*, and *esteem them very highly in love*.

There is the mutual responsibility of pastor and congregation, but it is clear from Paul and Peter that the congregation is not

biblically authorized to be in command of, or over, the pastor. The pastor, according to the Bible, is the shepherd who leads the flock. The pastor is the one who leads and the people follow.

I am thankful that the biblical way is how my pastor functions. His congregation esteems him highly in the Lord. In turn my pastor works hard to preach and teach well every week. He is a true shepherd. It is easy to follow a pastor who is an example to the flock.

When a minister gives his very best each week and does not have proper support from the congregation or denominational leaders, it is difficult for him to lead confidently. Self-doubt begins to develop and thoughts such as “Maybe you were not called to the ministry after all” begin to grow. As self-doubts creep in, discouragement and depression can develop. Tiredness settles in and fatigue is hard to shake. Going through the motions and simply surviving can become the typical day in the life of a pastor who is not supported.

This lack of support can erode the confidence of the faithful minister. Discouragement is hard to resist and the pull to walk away from the pressure finally culminates in him leaving the ministry. The statistics of the number of such cases are alarming.

Dean B. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger have conducted extensive interviews with clergy who have left the parish ministry, voluntarily or involuntarily, and with denominational leaders from five church bodies—the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Methodist Church. They write in their book, *Pastors in*

*Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, that in all five denominational groups, the top motivating factors for leaving were the same. Pastors reported the following:

“I felt drained by demands.”

“I felt lonely and isolated.”

“I did not feel supported by denominational officials.”

“I felt bored and constrained.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Drained by Demands**

“Drained by demands” is the condition of a minister who has lost the ability to say no. It is not uncommon for a minister just starting out as a congregational pastor to attempt to fulfill everyone’s requests and perceived expectations. In her desire to please people she starts down the path of wanting everyone to love her. The more she tries to please others, the more of herself she loses. Without knowing it she is beginning to wander from the God who loves and accepts her just as she is. God’s acceptance is not based on what we do or produce. God’s love is unconditional. It is sad, but true, that some church members have a difficult time loving their pastor the way God loves. The more the pastor produces, the more they seem to expect and demand. Their attitude is “We pay the preacher; therefore, she should do what we want her to do.” Demanding church members are rarely satisfied and can make life miserable for pastors.

## **Lonely and Isolated**

The second factor for leaving, “I felt lonely and isolated,” is an accurate description of being in a “dry place.” Going it alone is close to impossible. The pastor needs a pastor. A pastor is wise to not confide in church members. Pastors should confide in a trusted person moving in a similar level of authority. This would include another pastor, the pastor’s pastor, a trusted superintendent, or bishop. Some ministers say that having the Lord is enough, but in times of crisis we also need a minister with whom we can share confidentially.

Marian Rizzo writes, “Church experts say isolation and depression are two of the main triggers of clergy burnout. According to SonScape, a Colorado-based pastoral care ministry, 1,600 ministers in the United States are either terminated or leave the pulpit every month.”<sup>2</sup> I daresay that many of these ministers were living in the “desert lands” long before the end came. Being a leader is often lonely work.

## **Not Supported by Denominational Officials**

“I did not feel supported by denominational officials” is the third reason ministers leave the pulpit. In denominations where pastors are appointed to churches, the pastor is charged with the overall program. He is expected to lead the congregation in all aspects. Decisions have to be made that are best for the church. When the congregation supports decisions, positive results occur. Occasionally, decisions that are right are not supported. The

church is not a democracy, but numerous church members act as if it were. They honestly believe that the majority rules, whether the pastor agrees or not. This is when the pastor needs the support of the denominational officials. Trusting denominational leaders can be a huge factor that can make or break the pastor and his authority with that congregation.

Superintendents should be the ministers a pastor can talk to without being concerned about confidentiality. Sadly, this is not always the case. I remember several times when what I shared with a superintendent was not held in a confidential manner. When a pastor has this happen, it is not easy to be free around that person, leading to more isolation. When there is little or no support from the denomination and the congregation, the minister can easily experience the wilderness.

In fairness to the numerous superintendents and leaders who are people of integrity, I express my appreciation. The last superintendent under whom I served was such a person. Whatever I shared with him was always kept in strict confidentiality. He also supported my decisions as the pastor of a congregation in his district. This is a special gift to pastors when it happens. If pastors had the kind of support I had, fewer of them would leave.

## **Boredom and Constraint**

The last reason given by ministers for leaving the pulpit ministry was “boredom and constraint.” The everyday life of a parish minister is never boring yet ministers are often told by well-intentioned members that they don’t work except on Sunday. When I was a young pastor, this troubled me, because I thought

the people saying this were serious. As I grew older, I realized in most cases it was just something said in jest. On the other hand, I believe many members absolutely have no clue what pastors do every day. Pastoral ministry is a different type of work. One day may be an eight-hour workday and the next fourteen hours. Telephone calls come at all hours of the day and night. Members of the church can die when the pastor is on vacation, and some families expect the pastor to come back home when that happens. Sermon and teaching preparation can mean many hours of prayer and study each week. How could any pastor leave because of boredom? I truly believe “boredom” is another way of describing a sense of being *tied down*.

Members in every church have expectations of how they believe a pastor is supposed to function. Many of these members are still living in the glory years of their congregation when the Reverend Perfect was the pastor. In their memory, this pastor wore the proper attire, drove the right car, attended all extracurricular functions at the church and in the community, visited in all the hospitals and homes, and preached proper sermons, ending his message at the right time. All pastors in recent history are compared to the Reverend Perfect. Times have truly changed, but for some members they have not. All ministers face expectations, realistic and unrealistic. Some expectations become *constraints*.

## **Constraint**

*Constraint 1 a: the act of constraining b: the state of being checked, restricted, or compelled to avoid or perform some action.*<sup>3</sup>

The state of being checked, restricted, or compelled to avoid or perform some action is the best definition that I have found for the “bored” pastor. The pastor’s own feelings are repressed, and this constraint is reason enough for many ministers to quit.

I have experienced constraint and can witness to the restriction I felt spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The way I described it, I felt as if a python was squeezing the life out of me and my ability to minister to the congregation. I called my spiritual father and described what I was going through. He immediately told me that it was a spiritual attack of the enemy, and that it was called a python spirit.

Dr. Madelene Eayrs and Michael Kleu write about the python spirit in their book *Who Are You?*

The ultimate goal of the python spirit is to break down God’s plans and purposes by attacking those in leadership positions by undermining them through rebellion and anarchy. This spirit works by constricting, squeezing and choking the life of God out of a Spirit-filled Christian, and weighing you down and making it very difficult for you to be free and rise in the Lord’s presence. Breaking all that which helps sustain spiritual life and then cutting off the blood flow and breath to cause death. Its main purpose is to destroy and kill the spiritual life of the Spirit-filled Christian. In the church, it operates by suffocating the life

and fire of God like a blanket and quenching the Holy Spirit in our lives and churches.<sup>4</sup>

I realized some leaders in the congregation enjoyed having control and thus became the source of the attack. They were very “religious” and coveted leadership positions. They were the first members to welcome me as the new pastor and the first to turn on me when I did not submit to all their requests. These individuals attempted to micromanage my ministry and tell me how I should lead the church. Having seen them use the same pattern with the two pastors before me, I knew that I could either stay and be miserable or leave. I chose the latter, which in turn led to the beginning of my wilderness experience. In hindsight, I know it was probably the wrong choice, but oh, what I learned in the wilderness! It is impossible for church members not called to the pastoral ministry to shepherd the congregation. Some think they can, but God has not equipped them for the task. That is why these people must have a *scapegoat* to blame for the congregation’s dysfunction. The pastor becomes it.

---

## *Chapter 2*

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### *The Scapegoat*

In our society, it seems it is always someone else's fault when things go wrong. It is hard for many people to admit fault when relationships go bad or organizations experience difficult times. Taking personal responsibility is not easy. Dr. David Hawkins, director of the Marriage Recovery Center, writes, "Shifting the blame is the oldest tactic known to humankind for avoiding taking responsibility for our actions. While shifting the blame may seem innocuous enough, it is deadly."<sup>1</sup> This action is called scapegoating.

There is an organization in England, the Scapegoat Society that serves as a resource both for people who have experienced being a scapegoat and for people working professionally to resolve scapegoat problems. Scapegoating is found in all walks of life.

Could scapegoating be found in a local church? The local church is an organization. Therefore, shifting the blame happens more often in a church than one would think. Every congregation

has its own personality; each one is different. Misunderstandings create problems. Sometimes issues escalate and people's feelings get hurt. When peace cannot be achieved, people begin to blame others. The tension grows so severe that these congregations have been known to split. One faction leaves and starts a new church down the road. When a solution is hard to find, guess who gets blamed? Who becomes the scapegoat?

The origin of the term *scapegoat* is found in the Old Testament. The biblical scapegoat is a powerful image of Jesus taking away the sins of the world. The scapegoat is described in Leviticus 16:5–10:

“He [Aaron] shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household. He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for *the scapegoat*. Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the Lord fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, *to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat*. He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because

of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities. When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, *he shall offer the live goat*. Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions *in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness* by the hand of a man who stands in readiness.”

The iniquities and transgressions of *all* Israel were laid on the head of the scapegoat. Aaron spoke and confessed over the goat all the iniquities and transgressions. Aaron spoke to the goat, and he touched the goat. Clearly, the scapegoat is a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Jesus. On the cross Jesus carried on his body all the iniquities and sin of humankind. God could not look at Jesus, the sin-bearer. For the first time in the relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father there was a separation. Perfect communion was broken and Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus had become *the scapegoat* in the wilderness, bearing not his sin, but the sin of all humanity. He was totally alone in the wilderness!

Every time I read this scripture text, I feel pain and it touches me deeply. It is one thing to identify with the Christ, who bore our sins on the cross, but it is hard to connect with the scapegoat led away into the wilderness, totally separated from everybody and

everything. The tragedy is that the goat was the innocent. The innocent had iniquities spoken over it and the sins of the people were laid on it. The goat was guiltless but became the scapegoat for each of us.

If you have ever been made the scapegoat by others, then you can begin to identify with Christ in the wilderness. It is one thing to be guilty, deserving such treatment, but another to know in your heart that you are bearing guilt you do not deserve.

## **Ministry Scapegoats**

“This is entirely your fault!” she said loudly as we straightened the church building after an overnight stay of sixty Habitat for Humanity workers. For months our congregation had been praying for the Lord to show us how to be in ministry in our community. One of our members told me about these workers’ need for overnight accommodations as they were walking from Montgomery to Birmingham. Our church had a small membership, but we were willing to host the large group. We told the leader, Millard Fuller, that our building was small but that they were welcome. He accepted our invitation, and when the group arrived, we welcomed them with open arms. Most were young adults and college-age students. They had been walking all day in the hot sun, and they were tired, thirsty, and hungry. A bonus we received as we hugged each one was that they did not smell good. You know what I am talking about. After a picnic on the grounds, we had an outdoor service. Mr. Fuller spoke about helping the least in our community. It was a heaven-sent message and event for our rural church.

That night the group slept on the padded pews, on the floor, and anyplace possible. Our small restrooms really got a workout! The following morning, the group left early and we began to clean and straighten the building. “This is entirely your fault. This place stinks and we will never get it clean again. Why did you let these people stay here?” For more than an hour the member yelled at me. My only response was “It smells just like Jesus was here last night.” I did not say it defensively but sincerely from my heart. I knew that the Lord had answered our prayers and showed us how we could make a difference in our community. After the day of cleaning, I thought the issue with the complaining member was over. She rallied a few other members and made my life miserable for several months. It was *my* fault, and I became the scapegoat.

You may be thinking that the previous illustration of scapegoating is nothing in comparison to what you have experienced. You are correct; it was minor compared with what ministers have gone through. The Song of Solomon 2:15–16 says, “Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, while our vineyards are in blossom.” Being confronted by a bear might be easier to deal with than trying to catch little foxes. It is not the big issues that wear on the minister but the little, nitpicking “foxes.” The little foxes spoil the vineyard when it is in blossom. The little church foxes always try to spoil the spiritual harvest when it begins to blossom. They hope to stop progress before it becomes fruitful. What provokes churchgoing people to rebel against the one whom God has sent to shepherd them?

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,” it says in Ephesians 6:12 (KJV). These little foxes are people being influenced by evil spirits. The spirits are very cunning and deceptive. This is not to say these people are not Christians, but it does mean they are dangerously close to betraying the Lord. There is an opportunity for repentance, but these people are flirting with serious danger. Satan works through controlling spirits.

The greatest spiritual strain is on pastors who serve spiritually dysfunctional churches. These are churches with internal issues that no one wants to deal with. Scapegoating is prominent in unhealthy congregations.

Church scapegoating is prevalent in a dysfunctional church. When issues are avoided, a possibility exists for the church to implode. A pastor in such situations will always be blamed for the lack of spiritual harmony and stability. These churches usually change pastors every two to three years. The departing minister leaves the situation second-guessing his ability to lead. The spiritual warfare has bruised him. The *dry place* begins before leaving and often lingers for months. Scapegoating can discourage a pastor from trusting and exhausts the soul. The minister’s mind, emotions, and will are weighed down. Likely, he will sojourn in the wilderness for a spiritual season before experiencing the oasis of a fruitful ministry again. What happens in the wilderness?

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## *Chapter 3*

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# *The Silence of God*

Jesus said, “The sheep know my voice and a stranger they will not follow.” It is one thing to know His voice but another to not “hear” it. Hikers who have spent time in wilderness terrains often comment on how quiet it is. Occasionally, they hear animals and birds, but that is all. The journey into the wilderness is marked by a lack of voices.

Inevitably ministers experience the “silence of God” at least once during their ministry. The absence of the voice of guidance is troubling, because only God knows the way. Ministers cultivate the ability to follow the guidance or “nudges” of God, and when it is absent, fear can fill the void. Fear leads to anxiety and worry follows. Godly fear is positive for the child of God, but fear, anxiety, and worry are very negative. Their effect on a person who has known how to hear God speak is spiritually debilitating.

Not knowing what will happen next is equally damaging to the spirit. When it seems God is silent, the minister feels like a

fish out of water. Just as water is critical to a fish's survival, hearing God is critical for the minister. A minister can carry on for a short period of time trusting in her natural talents and abilities. When these run out, she has nothing to share. The ability to hear God is the only way that a spiritual shepherd can lead others over the long haul.

It is this problem that faces many younger ministers who have not refined the sensitivity to hear from God. Time is needed to develop sensitivity, and sadly, we probably all know of ministers who have never matured in this area. A minister with no direction or guidance is the one who finds desolation and dry places.

“Dark Night of the Soul” is the title of a poem written by Saint John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic, as well as of a treatise he wrote later, commenting on the poem. The expression has since been used to describe a phase in a person's life that is marked by a sense of loneliness and desolation. Faith traditions throughout the world have referenced it, but Christianity in particular. It could be said that a minister goes through a “dark night of the soul” when he cannot hear the voice of God for an extended period of time. My experience lasted one month. Hearing God's voice in my spirit has been a treasured gift for me. When I have listened and heeded what God has said, I have made progress, but the opposite has occurred when I did not follow the direction. The dark night of the soul was a dry time in my ministry. I had come to the end of what I could do on my own; and without God's voice, I realized how empty I had become. This is the reason the dark night of the soul is characterized by *desolation*.

How long one remains in this desolate, dry place is different for each person. I believe that we experience the silence of God when circumstances under our control and not under our control dictate how we are going to respond to the battle we face. Without total surrender to the Lordship of Christ in every situation, a minister allows interference to muffle or distort the voice of God attempting to speak into our lives.

Perhaps we experience the silence of God to learn to listen *for* Him. Listening for God includes expecting Him to speak. We begin to expect where and how God will speak. We become “anticipating listeners” rather than those resigned to never hearing God again. Dr. Walter M. Brown, Jr. in his book, *Why the Wilderness?*, gives this word of wisdom: “Listening *for* God is an exercise that others may not understand.”<sup>1</sup> Let this time in the wilderness become a time of reshaping your ear to hear and a time of repositioning.

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## *Chapter 4*

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### *Turning Stones into Bread*

The temptation to make something happen in ministry, when it is not happening, is deceptive. When what we need is spiritual nourishment, we settle for something that “looks like” what God would do. It can be the pull to try something different that tempts the results-less minister to ponder finding another livelihood. When this option is tugging at your mind, you then ask yourself, “Where would I go?” Have you ever been at this point?

The wilderness journey takes many turns as you search to find answers. It is very easy to get confused, bewildered, not knowing which path to take. The longer your search, the emptier you get. With each passing day, the memory of once receiving “daily bread” from the Lord grows dimmer. It grows harder to remember what it was like to be nurtured and spiritually fed. Even though you can preach sermons to help the members of your church, you are hungry. The bread-shaped stones in the wilderness begin to look like the real thing. Manna is not covering the ground; it is

only stones. The words of the tempter start to speak to your mind, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

You are not “the” Son of God, but you are certainly a son or daughter of God. The same principle is at work here as it was with Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus answered Satan, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’” A child of God not hearing the words proceeding out of the mouth of God is in a dry place! This is the reality of being in the wilderness. The words of God are more important than satisfying hunger, yet many settle for less than the best. Each stone in the wilderness represents the “less,” and God desires to help us get to the “best.”

During this period, I also searched my heart for unconfessed sin. Was it possible that I had overlooked something? Was there something in me that was causing this dry experience? Had I been disobedient and failed to follow God completely? These and many other questions flooded my thinking almost daily. They led me to times of repentance, but eventually I came to the realization that this was not the reason I was there. God had a broader purpose.

## **I Thirst**

Jesus is called the living water. He told the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” Water in the desert is a lifesaver. Drinking the living water is the only way that we survive our spiritual dry places. Jesus can lead us to that water when we

are at the end of ourselves. This verse is from Psalm 105:41: “He opened the rock and water flowed out; it ran in the dry places like a river.” Everyone living in a “dry place” needs to drink this water.

I find it most interesting that “He opened the *rock*.” This chapter began with turning stones into bread. We are tempted to turn stones into bread, but bread will not sustain us. Only hearing every word of God will sustain and guide us. In the wilderness, we find it difficult to hear God (the silence of God), and we experience a hunger and thirst to know His closeness again. We need to go to the rock in our midst. We must run to the rock of our salvation. Jesus is that rock, and He opens to us the water that becomes a river flowing into our dry place. The beginning of living again by the Word of God becomes the bread that comes out of heaven. Jesus is the rock, the bread, and the living water, and we find Him in our wilderness.

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## *Chapter 5*

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### *Burning Bushes*

The wilderness is filled with emptiness on one hand and the reverential awe of God on the other. The awe of God does not occur in the beginning stages of the wilderness experience. It is present but hidden. There are things that must happen in our inner being before we can be open to seeing the presence of God in our dry place. The deserts of the world, such as the Mojave Desert, appear to be lifeless, yet there are more than thirty known animals making their home in the Mojave. So it is with the spiritual desert place; it looks barren but life is secretly present.

It is the despair that drove us into the wilderness that blinds us to the potential supernatural manifestation of God. “It’s always darkest just before it goes pitch black.” I read this on a lithograph sold by a company called Demotivators, Inc. The founder and COO, E. L. Kersten, writes, “At DESPAIR, INC., we believe motivational products create unrealistic expectations, raising hopes only to dash them. That’s why we created our soul-

crushingly depressing Demotivators® designs, so you can skip the delusions that motivational products induce and head straight for the disappointments that follow!”<sup>1</sup> I am confident that no pastor would have one of these demotivational lithographs on the office wall, but there is something prophetic about Kersten’s words: “We believe motivational products create unrealistic expectations, raising hopes only to dash them.”<sup>2</sup> I ask pastors who find themselves in the desert, “What unrealistic expectations did you have when you entered the ministry?” Another question to be asked is “What things happened to dash your hopes?”

When starting out in the ministry every minister expects a fulfilling and enriching life serving God and God’s people. I have never met a minister who began with few or no expectations. For most, being called into the ordained ministry is a holy calling. Although a veteran pastor may have cautioned the beginning minister to beware of certain dangers and pitfalls of the ministry, the younger minister’s enthusiasm and excitement of starting out may override any caution. I know this is how I began. A seasoned pastor told me, “Bill, you are just beginning your ministry, and I would like to give you a word of advice. Take the middle of the road in your approach to the ministry. Don’t go to the left or to the right. If you do, you might go too far one way or the other and end in the ditch.” He then said, “If you will always remember these words, you will be successful and God will use you.” He spoke these words to me thirty-six years ago, and I still remember them.

I knew the spirit of his advice, but I cannot say I have always followed it. The pastor’s words were spoken during the early days

of the charismatic movement in the mainline denominations. He was simply advising me to stay “mainline” in my theology and practice of the ministry. He was a kind pastor with my best interests at heart. I could not stay in the middle of the road as time progressed, because I embraced the charismatic movement. It was for me a liberating and significant walk of discipleship. I believe I have remained in the middle of the charismatic road and have not deviated to the left or the right throughout the years. Being a charismatic mainline denominational minister has never been a negative during my years of the ministry. This is not always true for others.

Some charismatic pastors may themselves feel they are in the wilderness because they embrace charismatic beliefs. It is difficult not to become isolated and lonely in these situations. Most members of denominational churches do not understand or appreciate the charismatic pastor. This is also the case among some pastoral peers: lack of understanding and acceptance. Charismatic ministers can find themselves on their own with few people to relate to spiritually. These pastors desire to see the Holy Spirit manifest spiritual gifts in and among the congregation. When this does not happen, the pastor grows discouraged, and when they do occur, the pastor can face criticism.

In 1736 John Wesley, the founder of the United Methodist Church, described his wilderness journey in his journal after a fruitless missionary effort in the land area later known as Georgia. He had left England with great anticipation of God using him to reach the Native Americans with the Christian faith. They showed little or no response to Wesley’s effort. Wesley writes, “I

had learned precious little from my ‘trial by fire.’ I left America a dejected man.”<sup>3</sup> After Wesley’s return to England, he continued to struggle with discouragement. He was very close to a spiritual breakthrough but did not know it:

During these crisis days before Aldersgate I continued to preach faith. In each place that I preached, however, I was quickly informed that I should preach there no more. On May 19 my brother contracted pleurisy again, but two days later I received the surprising news that he found both strength for his body and rest for his soul. I felt like the dead sent to raise the dead, a Judas sent to cast out devils, a lion in a den of Daniels. I could only pray in my despair: “Oh, thou Saviour of men, save me from trusting in anything but Thee! Draw me after Thee! Let me be emptied of myself, and then fill me with all peace and joy in believing; and let nothing separate me from Thy love in time or in eternity.”<sup>4</sup>

Here we read of one of the greatest leaders of Christianity experiencing despair. I would say Wesley was going through a dry spell! He wrote of crisis, rejection, depression, and being an outcast. Ministers in the place of despair can relate to him. He may be accurately describing your life. This was the lowest point in his ministry. We know from history that John Wesley had a burning bush type of experience a few days later at a Bible study in a house on Aldersgate Street in London. Methodists call

this his “heart-warming experience” with God. Wesley received an assurance that he was saved and that he belonged to God. One could say that his wilderness months in Georgia were an important apprenticeship for the work that would be his for the next fifty years.

Paul Chong writes about the burning bush, “Biblically, great figures had spectacular signs of calling from God. Moses undoubtedly had the utmost privilege of God’s presence in the burning bush. When God calls us to a relationship with Him, one thing for sure is that we have to forsake our comfort zone and be prepared to bear the cross. A man’s life is after all predetermined by God. Moses was brought up as an Egyptian Prince, but had to flee into the desert after rashly committing a murder. There he remained for forty years before encountering God in the burning bush.”<sup>5</sup>

Moses had been at the top of the Egyptian government and experienced all the things wealth could provide. He lived in the palace served by servants. Moses gave orders and every desire was granted. He made political decisions that affected the lives of thousands. He had known life at the top. The wilderness was the opposite in contrast. He moved from the palace to tents, from having servants to being a servant, from authority to powerlessness, from riches to poverty. Moses was living in a style contrary to the way he was raised. Instead of giving orders to the masses, Moses learned how to lead flocks of sheep. Rather than dictating, he now humbly learned the way of leading the lowly. God was at work in Moses’ life, shaping him into a great servant of the Almighty.

I have met many ministers during my career who were “legends in their own minds.” Each one of them probably began at the bottom like me. Some were sons of well-known preachers, but they were the exceptions. I have always believed in showing respect for elders and leaders in authority. Over the last twenty years God has also taught me how to honor the different ministry gifts in the body of Christ. Among the ministers were men on their way up, and now I am meeting them again on their way down. Some are no longer in the ministry. These took a “detour around the wilderness” and crashed.

With the loss of the servant spirit a haughty attitude develops. The arrogant pastor thinks too highly of himself. I will never forget my last encounter with this type of minister. It happened in 1982 after I had spent two years on the road with Living Sound International, a missionary evangelism ministry. My wife and I had either sold or given away most of our possessions when we joined the team. We truly learned to live by faith and the Lord met all our needs. During the second year, a couple in Louisiana, wanted to give us a car. Since we were traveling on the road in a bus and going overseas for ministry, we said we would not be in a position to receive it. The couple asked us if they could keep it for us until we came off the road. I said yes, although we had no idea when that might be.

When our tour was completed, we came back home to Alabama. Since we had no car, I contacted the couple, and they said the car was ready for us. I was excited to get this news. The car was very old and had a huge dent down the left side. It also was a straight shift with no air conditioning. That did not matter,

because I was grateful that the Lord had provided this car and had used this husband and wife to bless us. I flew to Louisiana and drove the car home. It was in the summer, and it was hot here in the South!

I drove it to my preaching engagements and got some strange looks every time I drove into church parking lots. One man even commented to me that I should be embarrassed to be driving a clunker and representing God. I simply replied, "It's paid for."

One day I stopped to eat lunch at Hamburger Heaven and a well-known minister in Birmingham was there. I knew him and greeted him. When I asked, "How are you doing?" he answered with a scowl on his face, "Blessed." He then asked if I was the one driving the old Dodge. I said I was, and he said he didn't want my car parked next to his Lexus. He then proceeded to chide me for my lack of faith. He said, "If you were living by faith, you wouldn't be driving that beat-up junk." My reply as I walked away was "Be blessed!"

I no longer drive the old Dodge. Shortly after my encounter with the *blessed* man of God, the Lord impressed me to give it to a friend in Texas who needed a car. He was from Sweden, and when I handed him the keys, he rejoiced and said, "My first American car! Praise the Lord, my first American car!" He was so happy to receive the gift. When he left Texas a few years later to return home, he gave it to someone else needing a car.

Humility and an attitude of servanthood are vital for a pastor. Unfortunately, the egotistical pastor cannot develop these attributes without the wilderness experience. It usually takes a

drastic series of crisis circumstances in his life and ministry to get his attention. The wilderness makes or breaks a minister.

Moses made the transition from the palace to pasture and from the pasture to pastor. It was in the deepest part of the wilderness that Moses experienced a life-changing event. In Exodus 3:1–10 this epiphany is described:

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their

sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

It was in the “simplest” environment that the supernatural occurred to Moses. It was in the ordinary, mundane life of shepherding that the Lord got Moses’ attention. God used a bush on fire. What is so unusual about a burning bush in the desert? Nothing, but this burning bush was not consumed. This is what caught the eye of Moses. He called this a “marvelous” sight.

- A voice speaks out of the burning bush.
- The bush was planted in holy ground.
- God birthed destiny in the wilderness.

God will speak to you again, but it may come in a way you are not expecting! Burning bushes were common in the wilderness in Moses’ time. The Lord may speak to you out of an ordinary experience of your life. Because there is a tendency to think that He will speak only from the supernatural, you can miss what He is saying in the natural.

Just because you are moving in the common does not mean God is not present. The bush in the Exodus story was growing out of natural soil. It was the presence of God's Spirit that made the ground holy. Holy ground for you can be in the midst of your wilderness. Do not despise where you are walking. Take off your shoes now and begin to tiptoe to your next revelation from God. You are standing on holy ground.

Your destiny is birthed by God's word in the wilderness. The creative word from the Lord breaks the silence of God. One word from God can change your life forever. It continues to amaze me how a pastor not hearing from the Lord can suddenly receive a word while living in a spiritually dry place.

In our exile, a revelation of our intended purpose is available. It is in quietness and isolation that our soul is humbled so that we have the capacity for listening to our Creator. We are in a position like no other to "connect" with our created reason for existence.

Moses left the wilderness with destiny in his heart. He did not change the wilderness; it changed him. God repositioned him from shepherding sheep to shepherding a nation. The supernatural God transformed Moses to lead God's people supernaturally.

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## *Chapter 6*

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### *Roadway in the Wilderness*

The time has come to move out of the wilderness toward your destiny, but knowing the way is another matter. You did not move into the wilderness overnight, and you will not automatically relocate to the center of God's will for your life and ministry. Which way should you move?

Earlier I wrote that no one intentionally lives in the desert. We drive through a desert on our way to somewhere else. Since there is only a road in and through the desert, how does one leave it for a new destination?

Songwriter and worship leader Don Moen wrote these lyrics in "God Will Make a Way":

God will make a way where there seems to be no way.  
He works in ways we cannot see; He will make a way for me.  
He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.  
With love and strength for each new day, He will make a way.  
He will make a way.

By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll guide me.  
Rivers in the desert will I see.  
Heaven and earth will fade but His Word will still remain.  
He will do something new each day.<sup>1</sup>

It is God who makes the roadway in the wilderness. God makes a way where there seems to be no way. The roadway begins at the "burning bush." It originates from this point of intervention by God into our not knowing. This is the something *new* that is beginning to break forth.

The construction of God's roadway does not take forever to build. We have all been disappointed by the length of time it takes for natural roads, interstates, and bridges to be built. When God begins a construction project in our lives, it can spring forth instantly.

"Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:10).

The new way is not a restoration project of your old way. The Lord does not want you to revert to the familiar way. "That way" is what brought you to the desert to start with. Too many people are bound to the familiar and well-traveled road. Do not even consider going back now. The new road is the "road less traveled." You will not find great crowds traveling across this route. Jesus said it this way: "But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it" (Matthew 7:14 NLT).

Jesus said the new road leads to the gateway of life. This is the essence of the “roadway in the wilderness.” The “I Am the Way” desires to show you the way that leads to abundant understanding and insight of the life He has for you.

Do you recall the three warning signs along the road leading to the wilderness? They were discouragement, depression, and deception. You will not see these signs along the “roadway in the wilderness.” It is impossible for these signs to be posted next to God’s roadway.

In their place three Spirit signs are evenly spaced along your departure from the dry place. The first sign you will observe is “Encouragement.” *En* is a prefix that means, “bring into the condition of.” This sign is pronouncing, “You are being brought into the condition of courage!”

## Courage

Notice, “You are *being* brought” into the condition of courage. Did you suddenly become discouraged? No, you had one thing go wrong, then another disappointment, and so on. It was a progression from normal to subnormal life. Therefore, the life of courage will be a process. This development does not take as long to obtain because your direction has been ordered by the Lord.

“This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord, your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 3:9 NLT). Courage is God’s perfect will for our lives. The verse reveals that He does not want us to be discouraged or afraid. Courage is developed when we believe in God’s Word and His direction in our lives.

## **I Press On (the Opposite of Depression)**

This road sign points the way out of the desert. Removing the prefix *de* from the word *depression* reveals the second step to finding God. Breaking down this word we see a powerful sentence: “press I on” or “I press on.” This roadway out of the wilderness requires a decision to forget the past and press on toward the future. In Philippians 3:14 the Apostle Paul wrote, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Pressing on is a call to advance, not to retreat. Even though the going may be hard, the decision has been made to move forward. Do not underestimate the enemy of your soul who will attempt to put obstacles in your path to impede your progress. If he can stop you at this point, there is a good possibility that you will not leave the wilderness. You may find yourself, like the Israelites, wandering in the desert for more years than you should. The Israelites murmured, complained, and were disobedient. Do not let a negative attitude hold you back. Refuse to be held captive any longer; choose to move forward on the roadway to deliverance.

## **Perception**

Do you remember the last road sign leading to your wilderness dry place? It read “deception.” Your observations of the things that were leading you to the dry place were out of focus. Deception limited your ability to perceive. Life and ministry could not be properly discerned. What was lacking was perception.

Perception gives us insights that keep our ministry sharp and productive. It gives us the power to distinguish and select true,

appropriate, and excellent directions as we do the ministry of leading God's people.

Perception is also discernment. Deception blurred our ability to properly discern what was really happening to us. Paul wrote this to the church at Philippi:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9–11)

Discernment is God's will for all believers and especially for those of us who lead the people of God. Discernment is given to us by the Holy Spirit. Yield to His gift of discernment and your path will bring forth peace and fruitfulness.

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## *Chapter 7*

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### *Rivers in the Desert*

Not only does the Lord want to give you a road out of the wilderness but He has much more to give you. If you thirst for water that can quench your spiritual dryness, then God has the answer. I know where you can find this kind of water. Not only did this water save my life but it opened a new dimension of living that I had never known before. This water is supernaturally given by God for our healing and wholeness.

Isaiah prophesied, “Behold, I will do something new. Now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness. Rivers in the desert.” We now know that the Lord makes a road for us out of the dry place, but we also need to experience firsthand the “rivers in the desert.” These rivers spring forth as something fresh in our lives, not something we have experienced over and over in our past. This day is a new day! Your life is never going to be the same after you experience the rivers in the desert.

The wilderness journey is an experience of our soul. Our soul has gone through a period of time with no moisture. I am reminded of the words of Ezekiel describing his vision of the valley of dry bones, when he says, “And they were very dry!” Not just dry—they were “very” dry. The more we move away from God, the drier we become. A strange thing happens in this scenario. Instead of moving closer to God, our human nature is to move away from Him. We never find life going in this direction. The farther our journey takes us from the Lord, the drier we become. As we travel on the new roadway in the wilderness, our direction intersects with a river. This river provides two major opportunities for a new beginning.

## **The Joy of Salvation**

Where is my joy? This is a question that is asked by everyone who has lost their focus and vision. Without joy all of us become weak and everything we attempt is “tasteless.” In working with hospice patients, I found a similar parallel. As patients move closer to the death experience, their taste begins to diminish. Food becomes unimportant as they become weaker. Well-meaning loved ones try to encourage the patient to eat to regain their strength. The body does not desire food or drink because it is beginning the dying process. This is not abnormal. The body is beginning to shut down and therefore becomes very weak.

Can you see how this happens to the person who has lost their hunger for God? As the disease affects the hospice patient’s loss of appetite, likewise the dry place affects our hunger for the things

of God. This loss of hunger for God causes us to grow spiritually anemic.

Three adjectives characterize anemic ministers: insipid, lackluster, and wishy-washy. They become dull and bland. That is what food tastes like to the hospice patient: no flavor. Anemic ministers become uninspiring. There must be an epidemic in the pulpits of many churches, because it is getting harder to find inspiring and uplifting sermons. No inspiration in the preacher's soul translates to no fire in the pulpit. Ask any church member in the pews to give a one-word description of anemic preaching, and they will quickly answer, "boring!" The preachers of old knew the remedy for boring preaching; they called it "unction." Uction is hard to describe, but you can tell when it is absent. Uction is based not on the talent or charisma of the pulpiteer but on the anointing that comes from the Holy Spirit.

David wrote in Psalm 51:10–13, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You" (emphasis added).

When we have a desire to minister again to those who have lost their focus and to those who do not know the Lord, we must also pray David's prayer. A renewing and restoration must first take place in our heart. Although it seems that we have been away from God's presence, we can make these scripture verses our prayer for renewed fellowship with Him. Renewing and restoring is God's specialty!

The joy of the Lord returns as a process, much like a dormant seed germinating to life. First the seed loses its shell and a shoot springs forth through the soil. The upper crust of the soil gives way to the plant, tiny leaves sprout, blossoms form, and fruit begins to grow. When the fruit reaches maturity, it is harvested. Joy, likewise, begins to grow, and when the process of growth is completed, the fruit of joy is obvious. Our strength returns to us, producing hope and vision.

## **Living Water from Within**

Our culture is consumer oriented. America consumes more resources than any nation on earth. The assumption is based on the belief that the more things we possess, the more life we can experience. In my ministry travels to Third World nations, I continuously find people with nothing more than a thatched-roof hut, one set of clothes, and maybe enough food for the day. Even with so little in the way of possessions I find they exude contentment and peace. I ask their pastor, “How is this possible?” He always answers, “God is good!”

Theoretically, we believe that God is good, but experientially many modern believers base this goodness on what we possess. The more we have, the more we believe God is good. If we lost every possession, would we still believe God is good? The answer is yes if we have experienced the living water flowing from our innermost being.

Jesus prophesied “rivers of living water” flowing from our innermost being. “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (John

7:38). A river in the desert produces life wherever it flows. Along the banks flowers and other plants begin to grow. Animals are attracted to it. For those in spiritually dry places the promise of a river means life is available.

Jesus' prophecy of rivers of living water flowing from our innermost being is just what I was searching for. Knowing Jesus Christ in a personal relationship is the greatest relationship one can have, but Jesus offers much more. The river of living water flowing from our innermost being is known as being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can be released to flow out of us, bringing refreshment not only to us but to others. In Acts 1:8 Jesus once again prophesied to His disciples, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses. The Holy Spirit is the power of God flowing from us to others.

The rivers of living water are also given that we might experience the "abundant life" Jesus has for us. It is His desire to move us from dryness to a life saturated by abundant moisture. Where there is moisture, new life springs up. The Holy Spirit moisturizes our soul so that we begin to think possibilities instead of "nothing ever works out for me." The Spirit brings moisture to our emotions so that we move from discouragement and depression to hope and stability. The Holy Spirit is living water that carries us from the wilderness into our "promised land." Let it flow!

## **My Greatest Desire for You**

I do not desire to waste my sorrows but rather impart to you the valuable lessons learned through my wilderness experience. I did not stay there; I found the river that led me into God's plan for my future. I know the presence of God's Spirit and His promise of the Holy Spirit is true. The Spirit helps me to pray when I do not know what to pray. He knows the mind of God and prays accordingly. The Holy Spirit inspired the Word of God and therefore teaches me the Word. The Spirit is not only with me but in me. I am never alone.

If you have never asked the Lord to fill you with His Holy Spirit, now is the time. You do not have to wander any longer. You will begin to receive the direction of the Lord, and you will feed on living bread. You will drink of Him and never thirst again. All of this and more is waiting for you. You will experience a release in every area of your life. New doors will be opened for you. Your faith will increase to higher levels. The Holy Spirit will make Jesus real to you. You have come this far, so why not go all the way! The baptism in the Holy Spirit is yours for the asking.

## *Epilogue*

This prophetic word of the Lord was given to me by Dr. Mark T. Barclay on September 10, 2001. The writing of this book is the beginning of its fulfillment.

*I will use you to penetrate the dry places. I have people that live in the desert lands spiritually, and I will send you, not with watering containers, not with watering buckets, not to water by hand.*

*You will go and stand and boldness will rise in you, and you will say, "I can't help myself; I've got to tell you about my best friend, the Holy Spirit. I've got to tell you, I've just got to tell you folks, I've been enjoying praying in a heavenly language."*

*I am going to use you to water My people and bring moisture into their lives.*

I am humbled by the words of this prophecy and my assignment from God. Everything that has happened in my life has prepared me for this moment. I have experienced many blessings, and I now understand more clearly the purpose of my wilderness experience. I want to be a blessing to ministers going through the wilderness. My prayer is that this book will bring direction and hope to those in dry places.



# Endnotes

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