

We registered the land in the name of “*Christian Fellowship Centre*”. We now needed to build a meeting-hall on it. Again we decided that we would not mention our need to anyone. Little by little over the next two years, money trickled in – from our offering box and from here and there.

Then we faced another problem. There was a shortage of cement in the country at that time, and a *permit* had to be obtained from the Government to buy cement – 50 bags at a time. We applied for the cement and I went and saw the clerk in the State government-office for our *first* permit. He told me to come back the next week. I went back the next week and he told me to come back later. This went on for sometime, until someone who was wiser to the ways of government-offices told me that this was the clerk’s way of asking for a bribe! So we prayed. I met the Director in the department and kept going back to the office – and acquired a lot of patience thereby! Finally, after many weeks, we got our *first* permit. I had applied only for cement. But I got patience as well in the process! God always give us more than we ask for!

God used a corrupt official to enable me to partake of the Divine nature – patience! If I had given him a bribe, I would have got the cement earlier. But I would *not* have got the *patience*. God then answered our prayers even more than we had expected. Soon, cement became plentifully available in India, and the government cancelled the requirement for a permit. Then we could buy all the cement we wanted from the market.

We completed the meeting-hall and had our first meeting there in October 1981. We arranged a conference also that month – and this time more people came than ever before. God had known that larger numbers would soon start attending our conferences. Seeing that need much before we saw it, He gave us a meeting-hall just in time – just as He gave us many other things, before the need for them arose.

God had silently planned for us in love once again – and He continues to do so even today (*Zeph.3:17*)!!

CHAPTER 34

Reaching Out To Other Places

For seven years we did not do any outreach as a church in Bangalore. God kept us concentrating on ourselves alone. This may have looked very introverted and selfish to others who observed us, but God knew what He was doing. There is a time and a season for everything in the will of God. We can never build the church of Jesus Christ as and when we like. We have to wait for God's time and must be led by His Spirit at each step.

God knew that our church needed to be built together *as a family* first, before we could invite others in India to "*Come and see*". Under the old covenant, the emphasis was : "*Come and hear*". The old-covenant prophet would invite the Israelites to come and *hear* what God had told him. But under the new covenant, the emphasis is on a *visible manifestation* of the life of Christ through a local body of believers, and not just on a spoken message. Jesus said that all men would know that we are Christ's disciples, when they *see* our love for one another and not just when they *hear* us preach (*John 13:35*).

And so God built something into us as a church during those first seven years (1975 to 1982). He worked a deep work within many of us and taught us the way of the cross and thus we learnt to love one another. Thereafter, He opened one door after another for us to reach out to other parts of India – and finally to the rest of the world. God's way is always the best way.

In 1980, I was invited to speak for 3 days at the annual convention of the largest Pentecostal denomination in India. There must have been 12,000 people at that convention. I told them that the burden the Lord had laid on my heart was to speak, not to the laymen, but to their pastors and leaders (many of whom were sitting on the platform). I spoke for two days on being righteous in the use of money in Christian work. On the third morning the senior pastors sent me a message saying that they did not want me to preach again. Many of them were offended by my plain speaking. I accepted their decision joyfully, for I felt that the Lord must have finished saying whatever He wanted to say in two days – and there was nothing more to be said.

After the convention was over I had to go to another place in Kerala. The convention's organizers could easily have taken me there in one of their cars – but they did not. So I carried my bag and went to the bus-stop and looked for a bus that could take me there. I was not familiar with the bus routes in those parts and ended up boarding the wrong bus. I discovered my mistake only after I had travelled for some distance. So I got down from that bus and got into another bus. But the Lord had planned all this with a purpose. The second bus was packed with people and I had to stand. But right in front of me stood a young brother who was also returning from the same convention. We talked with each other for just about ten minutes and then he had to get off. But that encounter was the beginning of a relationship that has lasted until today. He told me later how he was seeking desperately for a victorious life at that time and was sure that it was God Who had sent me across his path that day.

God used this brother later to open the door for a church to be started at Kottayam – and from there to many other parts of Kerala. I saw that God had sent me there primarily to meet this one brother and not to speak to 12,000 people. How good it was that the convention's organizers did *not* take me *by car* that day. How good it was that I got into the *wrong* bus. If it were not for these events, I might have missed meeting this dear brother altogether. And how good it was that when I met him, I was not in a bad mood for the insults and inconveniences I had faced, but in a spirit of thanksgiving for God's

sovereignty. God plans all things perfectly and so we can give him thanks – *for all things at all times!*

In early 1983, this brother invited me to take special meetings for a small church of about 50 people that he was attending in Kottayam. I had also received an invitation to be the main speaker at the annual convention of another large Pentecostal denomination where many thousands would be present – *at the very same time*. I prayed about these two invitations and felt led by the Lord to turn down the invitation to the large convention and to go instead to the small church. That one decision had far-reaching consequences. A handful of people in this small church were gripped by the truths of the new covenant and decided to pull out of their denomination and to gather separately. That was the beginning of our work in Kerala. As in Jesus' time, even so today, the Lord is looking, not for large crowds, but for wholehearted disciples.

In the same year (early 1983), God opened the doors to Tamilnadu as well. In May 1982 I had been invited to speak at a denominational convention in Madras. A pastor who heard me there invited me to speak at some special meetings in Madurai. Some born-again young men (who were members of a large denomination in Tuticorin) came to attend those meetings. They were gripped by what they heard. But they did not have the money or the influence to organize a meeting for me in their hometown. But, in the providence of God, someone who was working in another organization arranged a series of public meetings for me in Tuticorin. A number of pastors from the city were present at the very first meeting. But by the end of the very *first* meeting, they were all offended by my message and never came back. Interestingly, the organizer of the special meetings also got offended and disappeared!!

So these young men (who had heard me in Madurai) took over the meetings and led the singing – and I spoke. I was impressed by the zeal of these young men and met with them privately later. We spent many hours talking together late into the night – past midnight. Then I realized that all the preceding events had been planned by God only to enable me to meet with this group of young men. Later in June 1983, these young men decided to leave their denomination and started meeting together separately as a church. They invited me to come and guide them and thus we had our first church conference in Tuticorin in 1983. How good it was that the organizer of the Tuticorin meetings got offended and left me with these fine young men. The ways of God are truly amazing.

A few weeks later we had some special meetings in Thanjavur and there too, I met some brothers who were gripped by the message of victory over sin. These meetings opened many doors in Tamilnadu and very soon a number of local churches were planted all over the State.

We never did any of this according to our own wisdom or our own plans. God planned and executed His work in His own sovereign way. We just followed “*the pillar of cloud*” as God led us from one place to another!!

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 35

Delivering People Oppressed By the Devil

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38).

Jesus’ example mentioned here, indicates that those who are anointed will have *the power of God* (see Acts 1:8) and *the presence of God* with them. As a result they will go about doing good and delivering people from the oppression of Satan.

Delivering people from Satan’s oppression is one of the main ministries that we have as new-covenant servants. Those under the *old* covenant could not do this, because Satan had not been defeated in those days.

But now that Satan has been defeated on the cross, he has no more power over any child of God who walks in the light. This was one of the great truths that the Lord taught me and that He wanted me to proclaim to believers everywhere. He gave me some experiences to prove this too.

There was a house close to ours in which an aged man was sick. To cure him they got a witch-doctor who spent some weeks, concocting some potion in a pot openly in their garage. One morning, we found a small pot containing something, lying inside our compound. We had heard that witchdoctors try to transfer a sickness from one house to another in this way – and therefore, many people are afraid even to touch such a pot, fearing that some harm will come to them. But for us, this was a great opportunity to teach our children the impotence of Satan against God’s children. So we just picked up the pot and threw it away. And we taught our children that we need never fear Satan – for he cannot touch us, if we walk in the light. No harm came to us. But the old man in that house died. But I gave him the gospel before he died. No weapon formed against us can ever prosper (*Isa.54:17*).

Demon-possessed people used to be brought to our house at times for deliverance. Some Christians warned us that we should not cast out demons inside our home, since we had small children in our home. But we had no such fear – for Satan is a defeated enemy. Our calling was to do what Jesus did – to deliver people from Satan’s oppression everywhere. God Himself would protect our children. So we continued to cast out demons in our house. And neither we nor our children ever had any problem at any time. It only increased their faith in the power of God.

Once at the end of a conference, someone brought a young girl to me for prayer. As I was talking to her asking her to give her life to the Lord, she turned around to me suddenly, changed her voice and said, “I have been here for so long and are you trying to cast me out?” I was taken aback for a moment by these words. But I knew then that she was possessed by a demon. I prayed in tongues (softly, under my breath) to build up my faith in the Lord’s power and then commanded the demon to leave, in Jesus’ Name. Since I had to rush away to catch a bus, I asked the local elders there to check that the demon had indeed left her. I met the girl later and found that she had been totally freed.

We had two occasions when demon-possessed people came right into our church-building in Bangalore, while a meeting was going on. On one occasion, as we began our afternoon session at a conference, a man came crawling up one of the aisles, like a snake, to the front of the hall. I had just begun the Bible-study and didn’t want Satan to disturb the study with any side-issues. So I commanded the demon in Jesus’ Name, to lie down

where he was. The man went to sleep immediately on the spot. As soon as the Bible-study was over and we had said the final Amen, the man woke up immediately. Then we counselled him.

On another occasion, someone came to our church-hall, just as our Sunday meeting was getting over and wanted to meet me. I told him to ask Jesus to come into his life and to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He shouted out in the presence of the whole church, "Jesus Christ is *not* Lord". Since he was a nominal Christian, I realized that this was not him speaking but a demon. I commanded the demon to leave him, in Jesus' Name. He suddenly took a *karate* position and then slid down to the floor like a snake. That was the day I discovered that there were demonic spirits behind martial arts like *karate*. I then picked him up and told him to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He did so immediately, and told us that the migraine he had been having until then was gone. These two events strengthened the faith of many in our church.

In a public meeting in one part of India, many years ago, where 30,000 people were present, as I was speaking from the platform, a man in the audience suddenly got up and started dancing in front of the platform. I requested him to sit down – more than once. But he kept on dancing, distracting the people. I then realized that this was a demon. I commanded him in Jesus' Name to sit down – and he sat down *immediately*. There is tremendous power in the Name of Jesus. Demons tremble at that Name and they have to obey instantly.

In the U.S.A., a young lady was once brought to me for counselling at the end of a meeting. I was surprised to see her dressed in very dirty clothes - because that was not the way young American ladies dressed. I shared the gospel with her and asked her to repeat the sinner's prayer after me, to receive Christ as her Saviour. When I came to the Name of Jesus in the prayer, she was silent. She said she could not say that Name. Only then did I realize that she had a demon. I commanded the demon to leave her and she was delivered immediately. Then I commanded her in Jesus Name to call upon the Name of Jesus. She did so immediately and was saved. The transformation in her appearance was so amazing, that she was hardly recognizable when she came to the meetings the next morning smartly dressed! What that dear young lady needed was not some psychiatric counselling but deliverance!

I have said all this not to speak about what I have done, but so that believers everywhere might recognize that Christ has defeated Satan on the cross. This ministry of deliverance is being exercised not only by me, but by others in our churches too. Any child of God who walks in the light and knows the authority there is in the Name of Jesus can cast out demons.

The tragedy however has been that *many* who were delivered from demons kept their house (heart) empty, and thus were exposed to more severe demonic attacks later – exactly as Jesus warned in *Matthew 12:43-45*.

However, *some* who were delivered have gone on to seek God earnestly, and been filled with the Holy Spirit, and become disciples of Jesus. Some are now elders in our churches.

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 36

Travelling Mercies

I have been in fulltime service for the Lord for nearly 41 years now (2007) and I have been travelling constantly. My wife (Annie) and I have travelled many hundreds of thousands of miles all over the world – by cycle, bullock-cart, moped, scooter, bus, auto-rickshaw, car, train, boat and aeroplane. I have been amazed at God's goodness and protection over us in all these years.

By God's grace, as far as I can remember, I have *not* missed a single series of meetings (that I had committed myself to), in all these 41 years – whether due to sickness, or a missed bus, or a missed train, or a missed flight, or due to any other reason. This has been entirely as a result of God working on our behalf.

I am 68 years old now and God has kept me in remarkably good health all these years. He equips our bodies in our mother's womb itself with whatever abilities are required for the ministry He has planned for us. Two very important requirements for those who travel constantly are the ability to *sleep anywhere* and to *eat anything* – and God equipped my body with these two abilities when I was born. As a result, I am able to sleep anywhere even today – on a bed or on the floor, in a car or in a bus, in a train or on an aeroplane. He also equipped my body to eat any type of food – western, eastern or nothing (for a few days!!). This has made travelling to every part of the world much easier for me. I cannot boast about this, for this is entirely God's doing, in the way He made my body. I only praise God for His goodness. The worst thing I have ever experienced in my body has been the loss of my voice on just two or three occasions, after much speaking.

For the last 25 years I have been going every year to Tuticorin, for the conferences of our Tamilnadu churches in South India. For many years, no train service was available to Tuticorin and I had to travel overnight by bus for 16 hours to get there. The roads had numerous potholes – which ensured that we stayed awake most of the time!! By the time we reached Tuticorin, the first session of the conference would already have started - and I would have to go straight to the meeting to preach God's Word. I would then speak at 9 or 10 one-hour sessions during the next three days; and immediately after the last meeting, catch the bus for the 16-hour journey back home. Yet by God's grace, I have never fallen ill or lost my voice at any of these conferences in all these 25 years.

Travelling in India gives us some unforgettable experiences too! I had my pocket picked twice – once while traveling in a crowded bus in Madras and a second time when traveling in a crowded train in Bombay. My money was stolen, but not my joy – for I had ensured that my joy would always be in my heart and not in my wallet! I also prayed for the two pickpockets. I am sure they needed someone to pray for them. Perhaps that was why God allowed them to pick *my pocket!!* God allowed this to happen also to free me a little more from the love of money. God had to liberate me from being calculating in my attitude to money - so that I would *not grieve* over every rupee lost *or rejoice* over every rupee gained! He wanted me to find my joy in Him – and in Him alone – a joy that could not be increased by any material gain or decreased by any material loss.

In the early days of my ministry, I had to travel for many hours in crowded, unreserved train-compartments. Most of the time, the benches would all be occupied and I would have to sit on the floor, or at times stand for the entire length of the journey. The compartment would be packed with people and luggage from the starting station itself. Things would get worse at each station along the way, with more people and more luggage coming in – and *the physical pressure on me would keep on increasing, as also*

the temptation to complain against the incoming passengers. It was on one of these occasions that God gave me this revelation: “If I could become the size of an ant here, I would find no pressure on me at all. I find the pressure to be too much only because I am so big. An ant however would find this crowded compartment quite spacious. There is a spiritual lesson here: *If I am always small in my own eyes, I will be free from all pressure and tension and complaints against others. Then I can always be at rest in God!*” I found that I could learn something in every situation.

Once when I was travelling in an unreserved train-compartment, every bench was fully occupied. But I saw one man sitting cross-legged on one of the benches, occupying the space for two people. Since I had to travel all night on that train, I asked him if he could put his legs down, so that I could get a small space to sit. But he would not oblige. The others who were sitting on the bench sympathized with me and were ready to help me find space to sit; but this man would not move an inch. I prayed then that the Lord would fill his bladder so that he would have to go to the toilet. Within five minutes he got up and went to the toilet!! The others on the bench quickly moved over and filled up the *extra* space that he had been occupying and gave me space to sit down.

In many overnight trains in India, reservations have to be made many days earlier (usually 60 days before the journey), to get a sleeping berth. Once I was invited to a certain place in South India for meetings and this required an overnight train journey. So, 60 days earlier, I asked the brother (who had invited me) to book a sleeping-berth for my return journey to Bangalore. But he forgot to do this and realized his mistake only when I reached his place for the meetings. He apologized for his carelessness and sent someone immediately to the train-station, to book a berth for me. But I could get only a *seat* in the 2-tier compartment on the train. All the sleeping-berths had already been booked. When the meetings were over, I got into the train. I refused to complain but praised the Lord for giving me only a seat and not a sleeping-berth. Next to me sat an old Roman Catholic nun. She asked me if I could do her a favour. She had a sleeping berth on the top bunk, but said that she was too old to climb up to her berth. If I could take her berth, she could curl up and sleep on the lower seats. I told her that I would be glad to help her in this way!! And thus I got a sleeping berth for my journey back to Bangalore – and I didn’t even have to pay for it.

Such incidents were not major earth-shaking events, but they showed me that my loving heavenly Father cared for even my smallest comforts, as I travelled in His service. God is good – all the time.

“He knows every detail of what is happening to me” (Job 23:10-Living).

Praise the Lord!!

CHAPTER 37

Planting Churches In Other Countries

Jesus told His disciples that when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, they would “receive power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). God does His work slowly and steadily – *in ever increasing circles*. I have found this to be true in my own ministry too.

We never planned to start a new church in Bangalore. That was entirely God’s doing. And then, we never thought God would reach out through us to other parts of India. When we saw churches being planted in different parts of India, we were thrilled. We then thought that our calling was only for India. But God had other plans for us.

One of the prayers that I have prayed for many years is this: “*Lord, if there is anyone seeking for a godly life in these parts, either lead him to us or lead us to him. If you don’t do either of these, then tell us what is wrong with us.*” As we have prayed this prayer, God has shown us many things that we needed to set right in our church. One of the main things He showed us was the legalistic and unfriendly spirit that we had, that we needed to get rid of. As we started cleansing ourselves from this, the Lord began to send hungry people to us – first from Bangalore, then from other parts of India and finally from different parts of the world. We did not go looking for these people. God sent them to us.

Here are *five* examples of the planting of churches in some countries. (I have not mentioned the names of the people or of the countries – in order to preserve anonymity.)

Foreign Country 1: A young brother living in this country (but originally from India) came to India to visit his relatives. While in Madras, a neighbour gave him a copy of the monthly paper that we were publishing, that contained an article of mine. He was challenged by what he read and decided to meet me when he visited Bangalore. I was not in town when he came home. But he met Annie and took some of our books and returned to his homeland. He was gripped by what he read and came back to India the next year and spent six weeks in Bangalore and fellowshipped with our church. When he returned to his country, he looked for others who were interested in an overcoming life – and found one or two. A few years later, he asked me if I would come to his country to meet with just the three of them. I agreed and went and shared the Word with them. From that small beginning, a church was born that is now an expression of Christ’s Body in that city. I have visited them a number of times in the last 20 years and we have had conferences for the church as well as meetings for the public. The Lord has added some wonderful brothers and sisters to this church and also removed some who were not called to be with us. The brother who contacted us initially is now the elder leading this church. As a result of visiting this church, God has given me openings to other cities in this country and this has resulted in many being gripped by the truth in those cities too.

Foreign Country 2: In the early 1970s, when speaking at a conference in this country I visited a large church here and became acquainted with a brother. He invited me to visit him any time I was passing through. *Ten years later*, I suddenly felt a burden to visit him – but I didn’t know why. I did not have the money for my airfare. So I sold my moped (two-wheeler) and bought an air-ticket and travelled to this country. I arrived on a Saturday and this brother arranged for me to stay in the guest room of their church. On Sunday, the speaker who was supposed to speak at that church’s morning service had not arrived (because his flight had been delayed). The elders heard that I was in town and asked me to speak. God gave me a word for them and I had great liberty as I preached. The meeting was so blessed that the elders asked me if I would speak again. I agreed –

and they immediately arranged special meetings during the next three evenings. After each evening meeting, I spent many hours talking to a number of the young brothers. Our talk-sessions would end at 2 am in the morning – for those young men were all hungry to know the truth. Six months later, these young brothers left their church and started meeting together on their own. They invited me for their first church-conference. Thereafter I visited them every year for a number of conferences. Over time, as in every place, some brothers left the church and new brothers came to take their place. This has been God's way everywhere.

Foreign Country 3: A young Indian brother (originally working in another foreign country) heard some of my tapes on the new wine (Matt.5, 6 and 7) and the new wineskin (the new-covenant church). He repented, took baptism and decided to be a disciple. When he came to India on vacation, an Indian pastor told him that I was preaching false doctrines and warned him to avoid all contact with me. Wanting to find out the truth for himself, this brother came to Bangalore and spent some hours with me and discovered that the accusations he had heard were all false – based on ignorance and jealousy. Later he heard me at a public meeting and realized the importance of family life as a disciple. Since he could not take his family to the country where he was working, he resigned his job there and returned to India, so that he could give priority to his family. The Lord honoured him and gave him a better job in this foreign country, where he could take his family also with him. He stood for the truth and two other families joined him. (At the first conference we had here, we had 3 days of meetings for just these three families!!) A little later, the other two families got offended and left. But God brought in new families. Since then, I have visited them a number of times and the Lord has added many others. The church here has been used by God for many years now to spread His Word through tapes and CDs to many thousands of people around the world.

Foreign Country 4: Along with the above brother, there was yet another brother working in *this* country who also heard the same two tapes (mentioned above). He too was gripped by the truth and broke away from the group he was with and decided to build a new-covenant church. I had the opportunity to visit this country too and we had a few conferences there for the local church. As in other places, here too, God has added some people and removed some people through the years. But the church continues on.

Foreign Country 5: I went to this country just for the purpose of meeting two young brothers from India who had gone to work there. I had planned to stay there only for a day or two. No meetings had been planned, for I knew no-one else there. But my departure was unexpectedly delayed for 4 or 5 days, because I could not get a visa for my onward travel to another country – because the immigration offices were all closed for 4 days of holidays. So I decided to have meetings here every day – morning, afternoon and evening. It was an unplanned conference – unplanned by men, but planned by God. God led us during that time to a wonderful brother who was seeking for a godly life. Now there is a flourishing church there under his leadership. *“The steps (as well as the stops) of God's servants are ordered by the Lord” (Psa.37:23)*. Praise the Lord!

The Lord is sovereign in the way He leads us in His work. All authority in heaven and on earth is in His hands and that is why He has told us go to every land and make disciples – and He has promised to be with us as we go (*Matt.28:18-20*). In the last 32 years, I have found that the Lord has faithfully accompanied me everywhere I have gone to make disciples. The most amazing thing of all is that He has raised up godly elders to lead His churches in all these countries.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 38

No Dependence on the West

I had an encounter with a refined Hindu gentleman in Madras 40 years ago (in 1967), that I have never forgotten. I was engaged in open-air evangelism and offered the gentleman a book written by an American Christian. He immediately asked me if I was a paid agent of America. I was shocked. I was certainly no agent of any country, preacher or organization – Western or Indian. That man did not know that I had quit a well-paying job in order to serve the Lord Jesus – and I was certainly *not* preaching to earn my living!! But I realized that I was giving my countrymen a wrong impression when I promoted books written by Western Christians. *It is the impression we give to others that is ultimately our message.* That incident challenged me considerably and opened my eyes very early in my ministry as to how I was to serve the Lord in India.

Most Indians feel that Christianity is a Western religion. They also feel that Christian workers in India are all paid agents of American organizations, and preach only because they have to send reports to the West, in order to get more *dollars* (or *euros*) so that they can live in luxury. So I felt I must do everything possible to remove this false impression from the minds of my fellow-Indians – if my witness to them was to be effective. As Sadhu Sundar Singh once said, “*We must give the water of life to our fellow-Indians in an Indian cup*”.

For nearly 50 years now, I have had the opportunity to travel all over India and to see the workings of many Christian organizations and churches (of many denominations). Here is what I have seen. (Please note that I am not judging anyone and that this is only *my personal opinion*):

1. More than 95% of fulltime Christian workers in India (that I know of), ***have never ever worked in any secular job***. In fact, most of them would not have been able to get a *decent, well-paying job*, in the secular field, even if they tried. Yet many of them earn **10 times** what their colleagues earn in the secular field. These “*Christian workers*” have free houses and cars and other perquisites (given by their rich Western sponsors) – that only the rich people in India can afford. So Christianity has become a means of *gain* for them – and not a way of *sacrifice* – as it was for Jesus and the apostles. The gospel records show that Jesus never called a single *unemployed* person to be an apostle. He called only those *who were employed* – and they had to *sacrifice everything* before they could follow Him. It is such people that He is calling even today.

2. Most Christian work in India ***cannot survive without Western aid***. And so we see the sad spectacle of “*begging letters*” (called “*prayer letters*”) and exaggerated reports of conversions, being sent constantly from Christian organizations in India to the West. Nowadays, many shrewd Christian workers have started asking their Western sponsors for large amounts of money, so that they can invest it in buildings and property in India, so as to become self-sufficient in the future – just like the shrewd manager in the parable in *Luke 16:1-8*. Any non-Christian can see through such American sponsorship of Indian Christianity. And now with the widespread preaching of the prosperity gospel and the unashamed begging for money by American preachers on TV in India, (90% of the preachers on Christian TV in India are Americans), the non-Christians in India are convinced that Christianity is not only an American religion, but a money-making racket as well!!

3. Christian theology in India imitates ***Western theology*** blindly – in every church and Bible-school that I have seen. Most Indian Christian preachers have no original revelation

and merely repeat what they have read in Western books. *It is as though God speaks only to Americans and not to Indians!!* Indian Christian preachers imitate Western preachers even in their pulpit-mannerisms! The old slave mentality (carried over from the days of British rule) makes them follow Western music practices and imitate Western preacher-habits (such as pushing people down on the platform, and asking the audience to repeat some slogan to their neighbour, etc.). The slogans that are popular among Western Christians have become the slogans of their clones in India too!

All these factors have compromised our witness as Indian Christians in India.

Indian money is *not* holier than Western money. So anyone (Westerner or Indian) can support God's work in India. But I felt that ***dependence*** on the West would present a wrong picture of Christianity to my countrymen. So when we started planting churches in India over 30 years ago, I decided that, with God's help, we would tread a different path: ***We would not be dependent on the West or on any man – either for our earthly needs or for our theology.***

I had decided when I left the Navy, that I would discipline myself never to receive more income than what I would have received if I had continued working in the Navy. I had also decided to live at a lower standard always than what I had in the Navy – because Jesus lived at a lower standard on earth than what He had in heaven. I also decided never to accept gifts from anyone who earned less than what I did, or whose standard of living was lower than mine – for this was the position that Jesus took too.

By the grace of God, I have ***never*** had to make my ***personal*** needs or the needs of my ***ministry*** known to any man thus far. My heavenly Father has always provided those needs in one way or the other. He has also sovereignly determined ***how much*** I should receive - and I have ***always*** been happy with His decisions. The result has been that, like Jesus, I too have never had to borrow money from anyone and I have never been in debt to anyone at any time. When preaching in churches in the West and in the rich Gulf countries, I have been introduced as “*the one Indian preacher who never asks for any money either for himself or for his ministry*”. I am glad to have such a reputation – for that was Jesus' attitude to money too.

I also decided that I would question every doctrine taught by men – even by the greatest of Bible-scholars – and accept only what I saw clearly in the Scriptures myself. So I rejected the blind following of Western theology that was being practised by Indian Christians everywhere. Here are three examples of what I have rejected:

1. The unScriptural Western teaching that the church would be raptured ***before*** the great tribulation.

2. The unScriptural definitions of the gifts of the Spirit proclaimed by *Western* charismatic preachers.

3. The unScriptural pulpit-practices of *Western* charismatic preachers that they claim are manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

I decided to demonstrate to my countrymen that Christianity came to India from ***heaven*** and ***not*** from the West. I was convinced that the Lord wanted me to have a clear, unequivocal testimony in this matter before my fellow-Indians, if I was to be an effective witness for Him in India.

I decided to be a living witness and demonstration to my fellow-Indians of the truth that if I sought God's kingdom and His righteousness first, He would provide all my earthly needs.

There must be no *earthly* explanation for the godliness of our life, or for the effectiveness of our ministry, or for the provision of our earthly needs. *The explanation must only be that our Father in heaven supports us and provides all our needs – and not that we have contacts with some rich people in the West. Only thus will God alone get all the glory from our lives.*

May it be so with all of us. Amen

CHAPTER 39

Life At Home

The Bible says that if a man cannot run his home in a way that glorifies God, he is unfit for any leadership or ministry in the church (*1 Tim.3:5*). The church is God's family. And our own family is the place where God tests us to see whether we are fit for ministry in His church. We have to build our own family in a godly way first, before we can build God's family.

Since I was often travelling in the ministry, I sought God for wisdom to balance ministering to the needs of my family with ministering to the needs of the church. I often wished in those days, that I had a spiritual father whom I could go to, for practical advice on such matters – but I had none. And so I made lots of mistakes – but I gradually learnt from my mistakes and thus acquired some wisdom.

Since my income was small (from my “*tentmaking*” business), my wife had to be a woman of simple tastes, who was willing to live frugally and to work with her hands at home. She also had to be someone who *enjoyed* being hospitable, for we often had unexpected visitors in our home. How thankful I am that God gave me exactly such a wife in Annie. God had prepared Annie from her youth to be the type of wife I needed in my ministry. And she has made my ministry so much richer and so much more effective. After the Sunday meetings, we would often invite people home for lunch – especially those who had come from distant parts of Bangalore. I discovered later that Annie often went without lunch on many a Sunday, so as to feed those visitors!!

Many young brothers used to stay in our house overnight after the evening meetings, because it was too late for them to go home. They would have dinner with us and use our kitchen freely in the mornings to make coffee for themselves before going to college. We had a 4-day conference in our home every year during the early years – and then the house would be filled with visitors throughout the day.

Once I was away from home for ministry for five weeks. We had only three boys then – and all of them fell sick at the same time. Annie prayed for them, took care of them, never burdened me with the problem and did not even ask me to come home earlier to help her. When she married me, God had told her, “Your husband is My servant; and I have called you to support him, look after him and free him for My work.” And Annie has done that job faithfully for nearly 40 years now.

I didn't have victory over my anger when I first got married. But things changed after some years, by God's grace. And now our home relationship is glorious. Joking with each other *every day* is a major part of our life together. I have believed for a long time that humour between husband and wife is the clearest proof of a good relationship between them.

Since I was travelling frequently, it was Annie who had the major responsibility of bringing up our four sons in the ways of the Lord. She prayed *for* them and *with* them constantly. From their childhood days, she was their friend – talking with them when they came back from school about their experiences during the day. And she would play with them too.

My task as a father was to provide for them and to instruct them in godly principles. I took them to school on my scooter – until they were 12, after which age, they started going by bicycles on their own. And God protected all of us from serious accidents on the

roads more than once. All of us are alive today because the Lord sent His angels to protect us on Bangalore's dangerous roads.

I encouraged my boys in their education and also to participate in extra-curricular activities at school. Annie and I used to help them with their homework and studies (up to 10th Standard) – Annie much more than me.

It was my responsibility to discipline my sons. I followed what was written in *Proverbs* (and in *Hebrews 12*), that children should be disciplined. And so I did that, even though I never *relished* doing it. But I revered God and knew that His way was the best for my sons. After disciplining them, I would often pray with them. I knew that anger was a sin, and so I wanted to discipline my children *without* anger. But I didn't manage that *always*. And so, whenever I disciplined them in anger, I would get alone with God and repent and ask God to free me from my anger. I must admit that at times, I punished them by mistake too, due to faulty information. If I remember right, I rarely ever disciplined my boys *physically*, once they became 13 years of age and probably never after they crossed 15. After that age, if they did something wrong, I would pray with them and ask God to show me *where I had failed as a father in bringing them up*. And finally, I have to say that it was *not* my discipline that kept them in God's ways, but *God's mercy* alone.

If my sons had an event in which they were taking part, at school, Annie and I would attend it, to encourage them. When they had important public examinations, I would ensure that I was available in Bangalore to help them. I did *not* want any of them to ever say, "Daddy was so busy serving the Lord that he had no time for us." I would also take my sons out for a personal outing, one by one, once a month, usually on a Saturday or a holiday. We would go out and eat something simple somewhere and talk together. My sons always looked forward to these "*dates*". Unfortunately, because of my frequent travelling I did not do this as much as I should have. One of the greatest regrets I have today is that I did not spend more time with each of my boys *individually* – because of the demands of the ministry.

I remember vividly how, on the birthday of one of my sons, I had promised to take him out for the evening. He was all dressed up and excited to go. But just then a brother from our church came to see me with a problem and I spent a long time counseling him. By the time I had finished, it had become dark and it was too late to take my boy to the park. My son was terribly disappointed. To this day I remember that incident with great regret. I could have asked that brother to come and meet me the next day, since it was not an urgent matter. But I was not wise then. However, my son forgave me – and when I asked him about this incident much later, he did not even remember it. God is so good !! I would advise fathers to spend more time with their children and to keep all the promises they make to them.

I wanted to win the hearts of my boys at any cost – so that they would follow the Lord wholeheartedly. I wanted them to be servants of the Lord, ("*as tentmakers*"), as Paul served the Lord and as I myself was serving Him. Today I am thankful that all of them love the Lord – and also respect and honour Annie and me for what we tried to do for them – as imperfect parents.

All glory be to God alone.

CHAPTER 40

My Style Of Preaching

God, in His great wisdom, decided that He would save people by “*the foolishness of preaching*” (1 Cor.1:21-KJV). Preaching God’s Word is therefore the *greatest* work that any human being can be engaged in. I feel greatly honoured that God called me to this ministry. But preaching is also the one ministry that has been abused the most, by money-loving preachers and deceivers.

We are commanded to seek earnestly for the gift of *prophecy* (which is the gift of preaching in such a way as to encourage, challenge and build up people – 1 Cor.14:1,3). So I began to seek God for this gift as soon as I was baptized in water. And when God anointed me with the Holy Spirit, He gave me this gift as well. In the beginning, I was tempted to try and impress people with my preaching and to move them emotionally. But one day the Lord asked me, “Do you want to *help* people or do you want to *impress* them.” I said I wanted to *help* them. Then the Lord said, “Then don’t try to *impress* them.” It was not easy to overcome the temptation to impress people, but I fought against it, and gradually overcame it.

Each preacher has his own particular style of preaching. Most Indian preachers imitate American charismatic preachers. I decided that the best thing for me would be to pattern my preaching after Jesus’ style of preaching. So I studied the way Jesus preached.

The *first* thing I saw about Jesus was that He preached only what He had already practised. He *did* first and then *taught* (Acts 1:1). So His preaching always had a practical application. I knew that the Bible commanded me to “*prophecy only according to the proportion of my faith*” (Rom.12:6) – in other words, only up to the level of my spiritual experience. But I failed here, because I fell a prey to the temptation to impress people. And so, I ended up in a backslidden condition for some years. But God was merciful to me and filled me with the Holy Spirit again in January 1975 and restored me. I decided then, that I would preach thereafter only what I had already practiced and experienced, or (at least) what I was earnestly seeking after. God then took me through varied trials in order to teach me His ways and how to trust Him in difficult situations. Thus I grew in faith and wisdom – and I could pass on this faith and wisdom to others through my preaching.

Secondly, Jesus always preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. When He walked with the two disciples to Emmaus, He preached to them for two hours and *their hearts burned within them* throughout those two hours. I kept this example before me and wanted to preach like that *every time*. A chicken-leg taken out of the freezer is totally unappetizing. But the same leg when cooked on a fire makes everyone’s mouth to water. That is the difference between cold truth and the same truth preached with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Utter dependence on the anointing of the Holy Spirit therefore became primary in all my preaching. I depend on God every time I speak to anoint me, so that my words will set people’s hearts on fire.

Thirdly, Jesus spoke *primarily* to people’s *minds* and not to their emotions. His preaching challenged people and convicted them and stirred them to faith and obedience. He never whipped up their *emotions* the way many preachers do nowadays. We are told to love God with all our hearts and also with all our *minds*. I felt that all my messages must be like well-cooked meals – both nourishing and tasty!! So I needed to take more pains in preparing a sermon than any housewife ever took to prepare a good meal. A good housewife also lays out her meal in an attractive way. I also needed to arrange my

thoughts clearly, before I preached. Many preachers do not do this – and end up wasting people’s time by wandering around in their preaching. God is a God of order (*1Cor.14:33,40*) – and He is glorified when a message is presented in an orderly, understandable way.

Fourthly, Jesus had the right word for each occasion because of two reasons: He *listened to His Father constantly* (*Isa.50:4*) and He had a *great love for people*. So I studied God’s Word in all my spare moments to know God’s mind accurately. To understand the Scriptures, many preachers study Hebrew and Greek. But I saw that what I needed was not a knowledge of these languages, but the revelation of the Holy Spirit, since He was the Author of the Word. The Holy Spirit taught me many glorious truths from His Word that I never heard from any human being. These truths led me to a close walk with God and saved me from the deceptions and counterfeits that are flooding Christendom today. The Spirit then enabled me to teach these truths to others. The Holy Spirit also flooded my heart with love and compassion for His people (*Rom.5:5*). Thus my ministry gradually became one of encouragement and conviction, and not one of legalism and condemnation.

Fifthly, Jesus’ preaching was always *interesting* - and *never* boring. It is a sin to waste people’s time. Most preachers don’t realize that stealing people’s time is just like stealing their money. If we bore a congregation of 200 people *for just 15 minutes*, we have thereby robbed them of 50 man-hours of their time. If their average wage is Rs.50 per hour, we would thus have stolen Rs.2,500 from them in those 15 minutes. So I prayed to God that He would help me to preach in an interesting way and *never* bore anyone. In the early days, I could do this only for short periods of time. So I spoke only briefly then. As I grew in the knowledge of the Lord, I could speak for longer periods of time.

Sixthly, Jesus used many *simple* illustrations to make His message clear. He spoke about bread, fishes, birds, trees, flowers, pearls, farmers, buildings, etc., His simple illustrations made the deep truths He spoke about, much easier to understand. He did not seek to get a name for himself by using complicated illustrations that only clever people could understand. I sought to follow Jesus’ example here too. At times, I would look at some of the least educated people sitting in my church, and speak at their level. Then I found that my messages could be understood by everyone. I would ask little children after my preaching, whether they had understood what I had said. If *they* had not, then I knew that my preaching had to become still more simple.

Seventhly, Jesus used humor and exaggeration at times. He spoke of a camel going through a needle’s eye, of people straining out mosquitoes and swallowing camels, of those who had big logs in their eyes while looking for specks in the eyes of others – and thus He exposed hypocrisy and spiritual pride. Humour can sharpen a message and make it interesting, just like spices can add taste to food. Some preachers however go to an extreme in this, and try to make people laugh *all the time* (just to get a reputation for humor). Such preachers become like circus-clowns! I never use humour in my messages to entertain people – but only to keep them attentive during a long message, or to drive home a point.

Eighthly, Jesus repeated His messages many times. He did not seek for the honour that one can get, by preaching something *new* or *fanciful* on each occasion. People need to hear the same truth *many times* before they can be gripped by it. So I decided that I would *not* try to *impress* people by preaching something new in every message, but would repeat a message many times, until people were gripped by that truth. But every time I repeated a message, I would seek to present it in a fresh way, as led by the Spirit.

Ninthly, Jesus spoke without using notes. Because His walk with the Father was so close and intimate, the Spirit gave Him words to speak, even while He was preaching. Most preachers *cannot* speak like that, because they do not walk so close to God. And so it is best for 99% of preachers to prepare their messages carefully and to use written notes, if they want to preach effectively. That was how I started. But nowadays, I speak most of the time *without* using any notes. But when taking a Bible-study, I still use notes and write down the verses so that I don't forget any point. So I'm not a slave to either *using*, or *not using* notes, since neither of these methods is more spiritual than the other. If anyone wants to speak effectively without using notes:

1. He should have walked with God for many years, so that he can speak from his life's experience.
2. He must be living under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and have the supernatural gift of prophecy.
3. He must know the Bible well, so that he knows what it teaches on *any* subject.
4. He must have a good memory, so that he knows where to find verses on any topic.
5. He should have good communication skills so that he can hold people's attention for the entire length of his message.

If anyone doesn't have all these five qualities, then it is better for him to use notes when preaching.

Finally, Jesus never shouted while preaching (*Matt.12:19*). Nor did He say "Hallelujah" every now and then in His messages. I have followed Jesus' example here too. When preachers shout in their preaching, it is *not* the fire of the Holy Spirit usually, but just their soulish attempts to manipulate people; and their "Hallelujah"s are merely a habit or "*time-fillers*", while they are thinking of what to say next!

In my preaching, I sought to get people to obey God's Word and to take up the cross daily and follow Jesus – and not just to move them emotionally for a short time. The goal of my preaching has been "*to present every man perfect in Christ*" (*Col.1:28,29; 1 Tim.1:5*).

CHAPTER 41

God's Time Is The Best Time

“There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven” (Eccl.3:1)

Even though man's need existed from the time of Adam's sin, yet the Son of God waited in heaven for 4000 years before He came to save man. But He came *“at the right time” (Gal.4:4 - TEV)*. And after coming to earth, He still waited 30 years in Nazareth for *“His hour to come”*, before He began His preaching ministry (*Jn.2:4*).

There is a *right* time for us too – for every ministry.

By 1995, I had preached God's Word in most of the states in India, but I had never visited Mizoram. An evangelical church in Aizawl (capital of Mizoram) arranged a series of special meetings in October 1995 to celebrate 100 years of Christianity in Mizoram. They made enquiries for a speaker and someone (whom they respected) told them that if they wanted to hear the whole truth, they should invite me!! And so they invited me and I went.

When I reached Aizawl, it was raining heavily. I immediately thought of Elijah who asked the Lord to stop the rain 3000 years ago. And I prayed that the Lord would stop the rain here for the next seven days, so that people could come to the meetings more easily. I remembered that Elijah also prayed saying, *“Lord, let these people (who respect Baal's prophets and consider me to be a false prophet) know that I am Your servant” (1 Kings 18:36)*. And I prayed Elijah's second prayer as well – I didn't know why!

The Lord answered my first prayer and the rain stopped completely before the first evening meeting started; and we had clear weather for *all the seven days of the meetings!*

It was only after the meetings were all over, that I heard this amazing story: The elders of this church had wanted to invite me many years prior to this. But they had been told that I was teaching heresy, and so they had not invited me earlier. It had rained heavily in Aizawl for seven consecutive days *before* the meetings. When the church-elders saw the heavy rain, they began to wonder whether God was telling them thereby that they had invited the wrong preacher for their meetings!! The senior elder told me (after all the meetings were over) that on the day *before* the meetings were to begin, he had prayed publicly at their morning prayer-meeting saying, *“Lord, if Zac Poonen is really Your servant Whom You have chosen to speak at our meetings, then give us a sign by stopping the rain and giving us clear weather at the first evening meeting.”*

God gave those believers *more* than the sign that they had asked for: The weather was clear for all seven days of the meetings. And to confirm that it was God Who had done that, it began to rain heavily once again, the very next day *after the meetings were all over!!* There was also a two-day strike in Aizawl after the meetings were over, that paralyzed life in the city. But God had restrained both the forces of nature and the forces of rebellion during the seven days of the meetings!! Then I understood why I had prayed Elijah's second prayer too. God answered that as well!

I preached 15 messages on *“Perfect Freedom in Christ”* and *“True Discipleship”*. And while there was no *physical* rain during the meetings, there was plenty of *spiritual* rain at all the meetings!! About 600 people were present at the first meeting. This number increased to about 1200 on the last day, with many people standing outside the building on the main road. The Holy Spirit moved mightily. On the last two evenings, I asked all those who wanted to repent and surrender everything to the Lord, and who wanted to take

up the cross daily and follow Jesus, and who wanted the baptism in the Spirit, to stand up. Hundreds stood up and I prayed for them.

The church-leaders were excited to see the work the Lord had done. One of them told me that they had heard sugar-coated words from other preachers in the past, but now they had heard the pure unadulterated truth of God, for the first time.

I understood then why the Lord had allowed people to warn these church-leaders against me earlier. If they had *not* been warned against me, they would have invited me to Aizawl *ten years earlier, when the ground in the hearts there was not ready*. And then my labour would have been wasted. God saw that – and so He allowed the church-leaders to be prejudiced against me for ten years. Once the ground in those people's hearts was ready, God removed their prejudice and took me there – at the right time – to proclaim the full counsel of God.

I have seen God working in a similar way in other places too.

Everyone needs to hear the full gospel – but people's hearts have to be prepared to hear it. The ground has to be ploughed up in their hearts before the seed can be sown. And God alone knows when any group of people is ready to hear His full truth. If we live in the will of God, He will lead us to such people *at the right time*. God's ways are perfect. It is best therefore to accept His timing in all our movements and *to give thanks for opposition* too – for even that can only fulfil God's purposes. God uses what Satan does, to further His purposes. Thus He makes a fool of Satan again and again.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 42

God Adds To The Church

Two proofs that God is still working in a church are that He *adds* wholehearted disciples to it and *removes* from it those who are not interested in following the Lord. We read in the Scriptures:

“The Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (In those days, only those who accepted the message of discipleship were considered “saved”) (Acts 2:47).

The Lord says, “I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and leave among you a humble and lowly people. The LORD your God (will then be) in your midst and rejoice over you with shouts of joy” (Zeph.3:8-17).

We have seen our heavenly Father work in *both these* ways in our church, from the very beginning.

In a country like India, with over one billion people, to find those who want to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ is like looking for a few needles in a hundred thousand haystacks!! We can spend a lifetime searching through these haystacks, and even then find only one or two needles. But a more efficient method would be to put very powerful magnets outside these haystacks. The needles will then be drawn out of the hay stack by the magnets – with minimum effort! This is the best and most efficient way of finding those who are wholehearted. And this is the way God wants it done to. Jesus said that others would know that we are His disciples when they see our love for one another. (John 13:33-35). It is our witness as a church that is to *draw* others to us.

And so we wanted our church (and all the churches the Lord planted through us) to be such magnets that drew disciples out of the thousands of haystacks in India – and elsewhere too.

Since the Lord commanded us to make *disciples* (and not converts) (Matt.28:18-20), we preached the *three* conditions of discipleship (mentioned in Luke 14:26-33) from the very beginning, – loving Jesus supremely, dying to Self daily and being free from attachment to the material things we possessed. We wanted to gather together in our churches only those who were interested in fulfilling these conditions of discipleship.

So we prayed that the Lord would add to our number those who wanted to be such disciples. *We never invited* anyone to join our churches. We wanted people to join us their own. *In all these years, since 1975, I have never invited a single person to become a member of any of our churches.* We have received only those who came to us *entirely on their own*. We believed that the Lord would send to us those whom *we* were called to shepherd and minister to. It is *the Lord Himself* Who adds people to His church. Jesus said, *“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”* (Jn.6:37). We believed that this would be true of us as Christ’s Body on earth too.

The Lord used amazing ways to *add* disciples to us. Here are some examples.

In a nearby country, there was a war that led to many people having to leave everything and to flee with their families in little boats. Some of those boats sank in the sea and many drowned and died. But some survived and reached the shores of India. The Indian government housed these refugees in a camp. Two of our churches were located near this camp. So some of our brothers from those churches visited these refugees (who were unconverted nominal Christians) and shared the gospel with them. As a result, a

number of them were born again. Our brothers then visited them regularly in their camp and established them as a church. They also attended a number of our conferences in Bangalore and elsewhere, for about two years. Their eagerness to share their testimony was so great that they would rush to the pulpit at our conferences and testify boldly. Our other church-members hardly got a chance to testify when they were there!! We were all challenged by their zeal. In one conference, after I had spoken about how the Bible taught that wives should submit to their husbands, as the church is to Christ, one newly-married wife from among them, wept and prayed to the Lord and begged Him to give her grace to be a submissive wife right from the beginning of her marriage. Never in my life had I heard a wife weep and pray so fervently with such a request!!

After about two years, the Indian government decided to send them back to their homeland. But by then, these believers had been well established in the faith and we could appoint three among them as elders, before they went back. So God timed their stay in India perfectly. Some time after they returned to their homeland, there was war again in their area, and they were dispersed into three different areas. But amazingly, each of these three groups had one of the elders we had appointed among them! So they could function as three churches under the leadership of those elders. Many others were also added to these churches through their witness there. One of our brothers visited them a few times and had meetings among them and encouraged them.

In another small town, there was not a single church there, since the time of Christ. One of our brothers was transferred there for his official work. He witnessed to others while he lived there and the Lord saved a number of people. He and another brother (from one of our churches) laboured together in this town, and in a few years a fine church was established there – the first one in that town in 2000 years. Very soon thereafter, we appointed elders to lead this new church. In a few years, this church grew further and reached out to the surrounding areas and two more churches were planted in those places. We have had conferences there regularly now for some years, when more than 1200 people gather together to praise the Name of Jesus.

Another one of our brothers decided to settle down in a new place, to start a small business there. Here too, there was not a single church since the time of Christ. Through this brother's witness there, some became disciples and there is a fine church there today – for the first time in 2000 years.

The greatest miracle however, that God has done in our midst during the last 25 years, is *not* the planting of churches where none existed for 2000 years, but the raising up of godly elders to lead the many churches. To find spiritually-minded leaders who are willing to serve and shepherd God's lambs and sheep, without any payment whatsoever, is an amazing miracle in a country like India – where most Christian workers are salaried workers – with the money coming mainly from foreign sources. God however, has sent us men who have served in our churches as elders and shepherds, freely – for decades now. Because we don't pay any elder a salary, we have been protected from many "*Christian racketeers*" who would have joined us otherwise. This is the problem that many other Christian churches and organizations are facing today.

Our magnets scattered across the country have drawn some fine and genuine needles out from the haystack. We hope to draw many more in the days to come.

Praise the Lord!

CHAPTER 43

God Removes From The Church

In the last chapter, we saw how God adds to the church.

God also *removes* from the church “*the proud, exulting ones*” (Zeph.3:8-17).

The apostle John saw this happening in his day. He said, “*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they are not of us.*” (1 John 2:19).

The elders of each church determine what spiritual standard they want to maintain in their church. Churches that have *no* standards of holiness will not have anyone leaving them. But churches that desire to live by the standards that Jesus taught, will find as Jesus Himself found, that many will leave them. And we have seen this happening in our midst too.

Those who left our churches first of all were the rich and the mighty who were offended because they did not receive the preferential treatment in our midst that they were used to receiving in the world and in other churches. It was *not* their wealth or their position that hindered them from becoming disciples of Jesus, but their *pride* in these things. We never cared for anyone’s earthly wealth or position. We honoured only those who were humble and Godfearing – whether they were rich or poor (Psalm 15:4).

Some others left us because they wanted to become elders in our churches – and were *not* appointed as elders! And some who were appointed as elders, left us when they were asked to step down from eldership, because of their unfaithfulness to their charge. Some of them wanted to make money through their preaching abilities (1 Pet.5:2) – and we are commanded to stay away from all who preach the gospel to make money (1 Tim.6:3). Others ruled over the flock as lords (1 Pet.5:3). And some of them attached people to themselves and not to the Lord (Acts 20:30)! God replaced all these elders with better men and thus confirmed to us that it was He Himself Who had removed them.

Others left us because they wanted to be connected with some *rich, Western* church – and not to a *poor Indian* church like ours. Most Indian Christians believe that Western Christians are spiritually superior, and so they are abjectly subservient to them. Many churches in India never have any special meetings without at least one American or European preacher as their *main* speaker. Only thus can they attract people to their meetings! We however, treated people of *all races* as our equals and sought to draw people to our churches by the *anointing of the Spirit* and the *message* we preached – and not by the *colour* of the preacher’s skin!! Many Indian Christians latch on to Western groups for the sake of financial gain and to get free trips to the West!! We stood against all such “*seeking of one’s own*”.

Then there were a number who left us because they felt that the standard of holiness we preached was *too high*! We preached discipleship, the baptism of the Holy Spirit (and His gifts), victory over all conscious sin, the sermon on the mount (Matthew Chapters 5,6 and 7), pressing on to perfection, walking as Jesus walked, a godly family-life, taking up the cross daily, separation from the spirit of the world, freedom from the love of money, fasting and prayer, forgiving everyone from the heart, loving others as Jesus loved us, building the local church as Christ’s Body, etc., Such preaching stumbled a number of people and so they left us. But this did not disturb us – for we knew that many were offended with Jesus’ message too, and had left Him (Jn.6:60,66). But it did amaze us that Christians who chose the best schools for their children’s education and the best

hospitals for their medical treatment, chose churches with *low* standards of holiness for their *spiritual* fellowship. This only proved that they valued earthly things more than spiritual things and their bodies more than their souls.

But we were more amazed to see that some who had *no desire for a godly life* still chose to *stay* in our churches. We discovered however, that they stayed on, only because they found a good atmosphere in our midst for their families. Our church was like a good *club* that charged no membership fees!! And so a number of “*Babylonian*” Christians still stayed on in our churches. Jesus had a Judas Iscariot in His church too!

We sought, however, to maintain a high standard *among the elders* in our churches, with frequent meetings and conferences designed specifically for them. God raised up some fine men to be elders in our churches. Many of them were not eloquent preachers, but they sought the glory of Christ and had a genuine concern for the welfare of God’s people (*Phil.2:19-21*). If we could not find even one such brother in a place, we would not start a church there – for without a godly shepherd, we realized that the sheep would only go astray.

As we look at our churches today, we see that we are still far short of what God wants us to be. But we are pressing on to perfection and we seek to maintain the standard of holiness that Jesus taught – irrespective of who joins us or who leaves us.

The church is God’s dwelling place – just like the tabernacle was in the Old Testament. That tabernacle had three parts – outer court, holy place and most holy place. In the outer court, great numbers of people crowded around the altar and the laver (symbolizing forgiveness of sins and water-baptism). In the holy place however, the number was much smaller. There, the lampstand, table of bread and altar of incense symbolized the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the study of God’s Word and prayer. But into the most holy place, *no-one* could enter, in Old Testament times. It is this sacred area that is open today for all who seek *fellowship* with God, who *surrender* their all to Him, and who seek to *worship* Him in spirit and in truth.

These three parts of the tabernacle represent three circles of intimacy with God. And every church (including ours) consists of people who choose to live in one of these three areas. The overcomers however are the ones who choose to live in the most holy place *all the time*, and who will therefore remain faithful to the Lord until the end. They are the ones who constitute the real strength of our churches – and of every church.

CHAPTER 44

The New Covenant Pattern Of Ministry

Right from the beginning of our work in India, we decided that we would follow the pattern found in the New Testament in every aspect of our ministry – *and not what we saw in the churches around us.*

In the first century, the Lord used *apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers* to build His church (*Eph.4:11*). We prayed that we would have all these five ministries to build the church in India in our day as well.

Apostles: *Apostles* were those who planted churches and appointed their elders (*Acts 14:23*). They were spiritual fathers to the elders and guided the churches that they planted. They did not make their churches into a denomination, but allowed each church to be self-governing.

We did not see any apostolic ministry in most of the churches around us. What we saw among them mostly were *two* man-made systems of church government:

(i) The *pyramid* system. This was a centrally-controlled system headed by a Pope or a Superintendent or a President, who had bishops under him, who in turn had priests or pastors under them who ran the churches. In many of these churches, the higher posts were all filled by election! This hierarchical pattern imitated the business world *exactly*.

(ii) The *independent* system. In this system, each church was totally independent and answerable to nobody. An elected board would invite a man with a Bible-college degree to be its salaried pastor. After a few years this pastor would discover a larger church where he could get a better salary – and he would move there. Then the board would advertise and find another pastor for their church!!

In both these systems, there were no spiritual fathers – only elected and paid leaders. We rejected both these man-made systems and chose to follow the *apostolic* pattern described in the New Testament.

Prophets: *Prophets* (*1 Cor.12:28*) were those whose ministry revealed the secret sins and failures in a church and who could prescribe the remedy as well (*1 Cor.14:25*). Their ministry was to challenge, encourage and build-up the church (*1 Cor.14:3*). But such prophetic ministry was rarely seen in our day. What we did see were *false* prophets who deceived the believers by *pretending* to predict their future (like fortune-tellers do). The Lord protected us from such deceivers and gave us *genuine* prophetic ministry in our midst.

Evangelists: *Evangelists* were those who brought people to Christ *and added them to the local church*. But in our day, we saw the emphasis on “*evangelistic crusades*”, where those who came to Christ were *not* being gathered together and built up into local New-Testament churches. Most of the conversions recorded in the book of *Acts*, came through *personal* evangelism. And God gave us some outstanding personal evangelists, who not only brought people to Christ but added them to the local churches as well. We also urged our brothers and sisters to pray that the Holy Spirit would lead them to those around them who were seeking for a God-fearing life. The Lord answered those prayers and added many disciples to our churches. We were about four families when we first met in my house in August 1975. But God added many thousands to us thereafter, from all parts of the world – and most of this was through personal evangelism.

Shepherds: The *shepherd* (translated as “*pastor*” in *Eph.4:11*) is a *gift* given to the church – and not the title of the leader of a church (as in churches these days). The leaders of the New Testament church were called *elders* – *not* pastors – and there was always more than one elder in every church. So we decided that every church that the Lord planted through us, would have at least two *elders*. At times, we had to wait for some time before we could find men who qualified to be elders. But gradually, the Lord gave us godly elders to lead each church. But we needed *many* shepherds (pastors) in every church (besides the elders) to help in shepherding the flock. Jesus’ example showed us that one man could effectively shepherd only 12 adults. So a church with 120 people would need at least 10 shepherds (pastors). God gave us many brothers with a shepherd-heart to care for the lambs and sheep, but we have not attained the proportion of 1 shepherd for 12 people as yet.

Teachers: The *teacher* in the New Testament had the task of teaching believers “*to do everything that Jesus had commanded*” (*Matt.28:20*). They did not expound the Scriptures *academically*. Their teaching was always *practical* and designed to lead people to obedience to our Lord’s commands – commands such as “*Love all your enemies, Forgive everyone, Don’t lose your temper. Don’t lust after women. Don’t seek man’s honour, Don’t love money*”, etc., (*Matt.5:22-44; 6:1-24*). We *never* heard any teaching on these truths in most of the churches around us. But God gave us teachers who taught the believers how to obey such commands of the Lord.

Financial support for workers: In the New Testament, the Lord’s servants were *supported* financially in *two* ways: Some were supported by the gifts of believers, while others like Paul *supported themselves*. But in India, almost *every* Christian worker was either a salaried worker of a church or supported by gifts from believers. So we saw a great need for *some* workers in India *to support themselves* and thereby demonstrate the *second* method of support found in the New Testament – and thus ***restore the balance***. So I decided to support myself and to serve the churches in India *freely*. I also decided that I would not receive any royalties for my books and audio-tapes that our church published. I encouraged my fellow-elders also to follow my example. The amazing miracle we have seen is that we now have more than 70 elders in the churches in India, who have been serving the Lord freely for many, many years. And some of them are serving in India’s poorest villages.

Reports: The New Testament contains many letters written by the apostles. But they never gave any reports about their work in those letters. Nor did they ask for any money *to support themselves or their ministry*. But almost every Christian organization (that we knew) sent out reports of their work regularly – and brazenly asked people for money. We decided to follow the example of the apostles – and *never* to send out any reports or photographs of our work, or to hint about our financial needs to anyone but our heavenly Father. We have followed this policy from the time we started the work in 1975 – and God has abundantly supplied all our needs. Paul shared the reports of his labors only with his fellow-workers – and we have done likewise.

Fellowship: Fellowship and unity among His disciples was the primary burden of Jesus’ prayer in *John 17*. And this was the goal of the apostles too. Most of the churches around us however emphasized *activity* – meetings and more meetings – and *not* fellowship and unity. We valued meetings. But we felt that fellowship was *more important*. So we organized picnics and other functions, at which we got to know each other better. We played games at these picnics with our young people and children and thus deepened our fellowship with each other. Thus we built a depth of fellowship among us that was precious and unparalleled.

There were many other areas like this, where we did things differently from the churches around us. It was a battle to pioneer these new ways of doing things and to return to the practices of the New Testament. Satan opposed us vehemently and many Christians criticized us. But God was with us – and that was all that mattered.

CHAPTER 45

The New Covenant Message

When we first started gathering together as a church, we did not know victory – either in our personal lives or in our home lives. When we looked at other believers, we found that they too were in the same condition. So we could not turn to any of them for help. So we fasted and prayed frequently as a church and sought God for an answer. We spent most of the public holidays in fasting and prayer. Gradually God began to reveal truths to us about *the new covenant* from His Word that we had never known before. As we began to understand these truths, we became more and more liberated – and our lives and our homes were *gradually* transformed.

I felt a responsibility then to proclaim these truths to others. It became clear to me that God was calling me to emphasize those truths in the Bible *that other Christians were not preaching*. So I listened carefully to what others around me *were* teaching. Thus I discovered what I was called to *emphasize* in my teaching ministry.

The Full Gospel: I heard so many preachers using the expression “*the full gospel*”. But when I compared what they taught with Scripture, I found that they were not preaching the *full* gospel at all. In *Hebrews 4* the Holy Spirit describes “*the gospel*” (*verse 2*), as “*entering into Canaan*” and not just “*coming out of Egypt*”. I also read there that *God’s people* were to enter into a “*Sabbath rest*” of victory (*verse 9*). So I saw that the message of *forgiveness* of sins was only *half* the gospel. The full gospel included *overcoming* sin as well (slaying the giants in our flesh). As such a life *gradually* became a reality to me, I began to preach the *full* gospel.

Repentance. Most evangelists were preaching faith in Christ as the *only* requirement for forgiveness of sins. Repentance from sin was hardly being preached at all. And even where repentance was mentioned, the root of sin was not being clearly defined as *selfishness*, *self-centredness* and *wanting one’s own way*. So people did not know what exactly they had to hate and what they had to turn away from. I saw that my calling was to explain the root of sin clearly so that everyone would know *what* they had to repent of.

Discipleship: Most converts were *not* being taught that they had also to become disciples of Christ. The three conditions of discipleship (that Jesus laid down) were not being explained: (1) Loving Jesus supremely (above all family members); (2) taking up the cross (dying to Self) daily; and (3) forsaking all that we *possessed* (not being attached to material possessions) (*Lk.14:26-33*). This therefore became a major emphasis in my preaching.

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit. Almost every group that preached the baptism in the Holy Spirit taught that its initial evidence was “*speaking in tongues*”. But I saw that most of those who taught this were worldly-minded and lovers of money. At the other extreme, I saw some believers who were convinced that all speaking in tongues was from the devil!! But Jesus taught that the evidence of the baptism in the Spirit would be *power* – power to **BE** His witnesses (referring to the way we lived) and **not merely to bear** witness (by what we spoke) (*Acts 1:8*). And so, I proclaimed that. Speaking in tongues was only one of the gifts of the Spirit that He gave to some. Because of my stand on this issue, the ‘*Pentecostal*’ folk labeled me as ‘*Brethren*’. And the ‘*Brethren*’ folk labeled me as ‘*Pentecostal*’!! I was quite happy to be equidistant from both these extremes.

Mercy And Grace. For many years as a believer, I had considered *mercy* and *grace* to be the same thing. But I discovered one day that “*mercy*” referred primarily to the

forgiveness of sins, whereas “*grace*” referred to the power that God gave us to overcome sin and the trials of life (*Heb.4:16; Rom.6:14; 2 Cor.12:9*). And this ‘*grace*’ came through Christ (*Jn.1:17*) and became available only after the Holy Spirit came to indwell man on the day of Pentecost. This also became a major part of my message.

The Humanity of Christ. While all Christians worshipped Christ as *God* very few emphasized that He was also a *Man* whose example we could follow. Some who did emphasize His humanity denied that He was God when He was on earth. It was rare to find Christians who proclaimed the balanced Scriptural view that Christ was fully God and fully Man. But I saw that “*the secret of living a godly life*” lay in seeing Christ having overcome sin as a Man (*1 Tim.3:16; Heb.4:15,16*). This too became a major emphasis in my preaching.

Money: When we started our work in 1975, the prosperity gospel (that we hear so much of today) was not in vogue. But Christians still loved money just as they do today. Jesus taught that those who loved money *hated God* (*Lk.16:13*). But I never heard a single preacher preach this message. Most churches only taught their members to pay their tithes. But tithing was part of the old-covenant law that had been abolished in Christ. I preached the liberating *new covenant* message of giving *joyfully, secretly* and *voluntarily* to the Lord. Another thing I saw was that hardly any church in India (that I knew of) preached strongly against the evil practice of asking for a dowry in marriages – a practice that degraded women all over India. I preached strongly against this evil practice; and when conducting weddings, took signed certificates from both the bride and the bridegroom that stated that no money had been exchanged between them or between their parents.

Soul And Spirit. This was another subject that was not being preached. In Old Testament times, there was no clear revelation on the difference between man’s soul and his spirit. But the New Testament makes a clear distinction between the two (*Heb.4:12*). Since most Christians did not know this distinction clearly, they were being deceived by the psychological gimmicks of clever preachers and by emotional counterfeits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So I taught people the difference between what is truly spiritual; and what is merely soulish.

The Local Body of Christ. I saw clearly that the final goal of God was to make all His children into one Body in Christ. The New Testament church was to be a *Body* and *not* a *congregation*. In a *Body* (as in the human body), every member would be connected to the other members and each would have a unique function. Christ *alone* would be the Head and all the others would be *equal members*. I saw that this was the type of church that God wanted to see in every locality on earth. And so I decided to spend my life building such expressions of Christ’s Body wherever possible on earth.

The New Covenant. All these truths were related to the *new covenant* that God had made with man through the death and resurrection of Christ. I saw that the greatest need among believers was for their eyes to be opened to see the greater glory of the new covenant compared to the old covenant. This therefore became the major thrust of all my preaching – and it continues to be so.

These were some of the major truths that God showed me that I sought to proclaim by every possible means – preaching, books, tapes, etc., – to my fellow-believers. My burden was to spread these truths all over India. But God saw fit to spread these messages even further – to people in many other countries as well.

All glory be to His Name alone.

CHAPTER 46 The Mistakes We Made

Just as babies to learn to walk only after falling down often, God allows His children also to learn to walk in the Spirit, only after they fall numerous times. Apart from our Lord Jesus Himself, no man or church ever avoided making mistakes as they sought to walk with the Lord. As a church, we also made many mistakes – from the very beginning. But we decided to acknowledge our mistakes and to learn lessons from them, so that we did not repeat them. Thus our blunders became less and less as we went on.

The apostle Paul made many mistakes too – circumcising Timothy (*Acts 16:3*), shaving his head to fulfil a Jewish vow (*Acts 21:24-26*) and even getting angry with a judge towards the end of his life (*Acts 23:3*). Luke (Paul's close companion) was the one who wrote *Acts*. Left to himself, Luke would not have mentioned any of Paul's mistakes – as is the practice of most biographers. But when Paul knew that Luke was writing about him, he must have compelled Luke to write about his (Paul's) mistakes as well, because Paul did not “*want anyone to think more highly of him than he should*” (*2 Cor.12:6-Living*).

We do not want anyone to think too much of us either.

Social Work: The first mistake we made was to help *everyone* who came to us for financial and material help. We were few in number and poor, but we were generous with what we had – *and very unwise*. In a country like India, there are many who will pretend to be Christians and join a church only to take advantage of its generosity. We helped people with money. My wife prepared numerous meals for visitors and did day-care for mothers who left their babies in our home. Numerous families who visited Bangalore stayed in our home and took advantage of our hospitality. One of those people even dropped our newborn son on the concrete floor once, while tossing him around, as if he were a ball. We served others to show them the love of Christ, hoping that some of them would become disciples of our Lord. My wife and I do *not* regret any of the sacrifices we made. We knew that we had to pay a price if we wanted to build the Body of Christ. But gradually we realized that God had not called us to do social work but to *make disciples*. We also found that almost *every single person* whom we helped thus, left the church as soon as we stopped helping them. That showed us that they had no interest in becoming disciples of Christ, but only wanted financial and physical help. The world is full of people who are looking for monetary help and for free service!! So we learnt our lesson and decided thereafter to concentrate on making disciples. We still help the poor where we can, but we do it more wisely now.

Legalism: The second serious mistake we made in our pursuit of holiness was to emphasize the letter of Scripture rather than its *spirit*. This is a mistake made by almost all who pursue holiness and perfection. We knew that worldliness was to be found in the attitude of our mind and not in externals; but we still emphasized some externals like dress-styles and the length of people's hair, etc., We were influenced unfortunately, by some of the “holiness” preachers who visited us and preached to us. Some of their teachings were good but they were mixed with heavy doses of legalism. It was like eating a chicken curry with a dead lizard in it that could poison us and kill us. In time, we realized that external changes only made people greater Pharisees! Most evangelical Christian churches are either at one extreme of worldliness or at the other extreme of legalism. It was not easy to find the narrow way to life that lay between these two

extremes. But that was what we sought to find. By God's grace, we slowly found it and began to experience what it means to *walk in the Spirit*.

The Inward Look: Another mistake that we made in our pursuit of holiness was to look inside constantly and to examine ourselves and dig out all the dirt we could discover in our flesh – and the flesh is a very deep pit (*Rom.7:18*). Even the songs we sang were inward looking. We hardly ever sang a song of pure thanksgiving and praise to God. The result was that we became gloomy and morose ourselves and hard and judgmental toward others. But God in His great love for us, amazingly removed the legalistic influences and the songs that we were singing, that depressed us. And He led us out into “*the glorious liberty of the children of God*”. We realized then that we are to run the Christian race, looking at Jesus alone – and **not** inside ourselves. It is as we see His glory, that we will see our own need more clearly and readily acknowledge it too. Then we can trust Him to deliver us from those sins. That way, there will be neither depression nor gloom in our lives.

Gifts of the Spirit: Another mistake we made was the lack of a strong emphasis on the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a church, we started out emphasizing the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit. But then in pursuing the *fruit* of the Spirit, and in a *pedulumitis*-reaction to the wild extremes that we had seen among the charismatics and the Pentecostals, and due to the influence of preachers who never spoke about the gifts of the Spirit, we ignored many of the gifts of the Spirit. The result was that believers in our midst did not experience the power and the gifts that the early Christians had. It took many years for us to come back to preaching and emphasizing the power of the Spirit and His supernatural gifts.

The ministry of women: Yet another mistake that many elders in our churches made was caused by their male chauvinism and the prejudices of Indian culture. They followed the Brethren-assembly practice of keeping the women silent. Although women were allowed to pray, they were never encouraged to share God's Word in the church-meetings or to guide and encourage the younger sisters. These elders forgot that under the new covenant “*God's sons and daughters could prophesy*” (*Acts 2:17*). As a result, old-covenant practices continued in almost all our churches for many years and many of our young sisters lacked godly counsel from older sisters and thereby suffered spiritually. My wife had the gift of prophecy. I knew that because I had been blessed by her prophesying myself - on a number of occasions. But I did not want to push her forward in the church. I taught the new covenant privileges of God's daughters in the churches. But it took many years for some of our elders to change their views and to align their views with Scripture. It is very difficult to break free from traditions that have been acquired over a period of many years. Consequently, many young people suffer.

There were other lesser mistakes that we made. But God was gracious to us and we progressed.

All movements decline over a period of time as more and more people start joining it who are not serious about being disciples of the Lord. Elder brothers also can backslide when they experience God's blessing on their labours and become financially prosperous. We have seen this happen in our midst too. We are no different from any other movement that God has raised up through the centuries. So we walk in humility and brokenness before Him and ask Him to preserve us in faithfulness to Him until the end.

God has given us an excellent and fantastically *loyal* group of co-workers, in Bangalore and in other places. And through them, God has built a quality of fellowship amongst us that is unique – a fellowship that has protected and preserved our children and

that has been a foretaste of heaven itself. We have never found anything like it anywhere else. For this we are deeply thankful to the Lord.

Our greatest encouragement through all these years has been that God has given us light continually on our errors and mistakes and the imbalances that we have. The greatest proof of God's blessing on our lives is His giving us light on the un-Christlike areas in our lives and making us Christlike in those areas by the power of His Spirit. This message needs to be emphasized in a day when many Christians are being taught that financial prosperity and physical health are the primary marks of God's blessing.

All glory be to God alone for His mercy and His grace that He has showered upon us – day after day and year after year.

CHAPTER 47

Making Disciples In All Nations

Since it was easier to make converts than disciples, most churches in India made only *converts*. But we decided to take our Lord's command seriously, to make *disciples* (*Matt.28:19*). And so we proclaimed the standards of holiness that Jesus proclaimed in the sermon on the mount (*Matt.5 to 7*). We taught what Jesus taught – that no-one could follow Him who did not die to Self *daily* (*Lk.9:23*) and that anyone who loved money could not love God (*Lk.16:13*).

God has a particular calling *for each church*. Our churches were raised up by God *not* to do missionary work among the unreached – because many thousands were already doing this good and necessary work in India. He called us to do what was *not* being done by the others – to make the converts into *disciples*. He told us to teach believers those Biblical truths that other preachers were *not* teaching, to lead them into new-covenant life (the new wine) and then to build them together in new-covenant churches (the new wineskin). Many believers criticized us for not engaging in evangelism, but we stuck to our calling. We knew that all parts of the Body do not have the same function. The hand takes food from the plate and puts it into the mouth (a picture of evangelism), while the kidneys spend all their time just purifying the bloodstream and maintaining the balance of chemicals in the blood (a picture of purifying believers and making them balanced). We stuck to our God-given calling as “*kidneys*” in the Body.

We also followed the financial principles found in the New Testament: We never paid any of our church-elders a salary. Every elder had to support himself or trust the Lord for his needs, just like the apostles and elders in the New Testament. And like the apostles, we also never made our financial needs known to anyone.

Most Christian work in India is heavily dependent on Western money and this is why so much of Indian Christianity is so shallow. God's work cannot be done through dependence on money. So we decided not to join any *foreign* organization. We decided to depend on the Holy Spirit *alone*.

We knew that if we followed these New Testament principles, our growth would be *very slow*. But that did not disturb us because we knew that the Lord looked for *quality* in His work and *not* quantity. As the Lord's servants, we were responsible for “*quality control*” in His church. The Lord would take care of the “*quantity*” aspect. And He did that. He added to our churches those whom *we* were supposed to shepherd – and He added them at the right time - *when we were able to handle it*. God's ways are perfect.

We knew that only few would choose this way of discipleship, for Jesus had said, “*The way of discipleship that I have just described (referring to the sermon on the mount – Matt, 5 to 7) is very narrow but it leads to life, and only a few will ever find it. Beware however of false prophets who will come to you in sheep's clothing (= having the right doctrines), and tell you that great multitudes will become My disciples and find this way to life*” (*Paraphrase of Matt.7:13-16*).

We knew from these words of our Lord, that if we proclaimed His standards faithfully, *very few* would join us. We could increase our numbers only by lowering our standards. But we refused to be false prophets! It was *not* right to sacrifice *even one* Biblical principle for the sake of larger numbers.

The *Message Bible* translation of the above verses reads thus: “*Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practised sincerity...They are out to rip you off in some way or other. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. Don't be*

*impressed with charisma; look for character. **Who** preachers are, is the main thing, **not what they say**. A genuine leader will never exploit your **emotions** or your **wallet**.”*

God keeps His servants hidden and tests them in secret before He entrusts a ministry to them. He kept Moses hidden in the backside of the desert for 40 years and tested him before He sent him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Jesus was kept hidden for 30 years in Nazareth and tested before He was sent forth into His ministry. God kept our church also hidden in the same way. For about 20 years (from 1975 to 1995) He kept our church hidden under a covering of reproach, misunderstanding and criticism from other Christians. God tested us to see if we would stand true to Him when faced with such strong opposition from others. He also tested us to see if we would retaliate against our accusers or trust Him alone to defend us and vindicate us *in His time*.

Once we had passed these tests, God began to open one door after another for us all over the world, to proclaim the glorious gospel of the new covenant – that had produced such wonderful fruit in our lives and in our homes. The numbers who responded to these truths were still *small*, but the outreach was *worldwide*.

We did this outreach mainly through literature, cassettes, CDs and the Internet. This was not the work of any one man, but the work of many men and women in the Body of Christ who worked together to spread God’s Word.

Literature: Sticking to our calling, we published books and magazines about those subjects in the New Testament that others never wrote about. God gave some of our brothers a burden to translate and publish these books in other Indian languages – and they worked hard to produce and distribute these translations. Thus the word of the Lord spread far and wide in South India – and many churches were established. About one million copies of our books in many languages have now gone into people’s hands.

Cassettes and CDs: One of our smaller churches copied and distributed nearly 35,000 tapes and CDs of our messages to people in their city. Many who got these tapes made copies of them and distributed them to others in many lands. (We encourage people to do that). In the USA, two church-leaders added our tapes to their church’s tape catalogues. This resulted in about 100,000 tapes of our messages being circulated *freely* by them in many lands. In South India, a mission-leader invited me to take a study of every book of the Bible in his Bible-college in December 2000. God gave me grace to do this in 70 hours – over a 14-day period, speaking 5 hours every day. The messages were recorded digitally on a CD. Thus we produced the first audio CD in the world to contain *70 hours of study* covering every book of the Bible *on a single CD*. This CD also has been circulated widely, and has enabled thousands of believers in many lands to understand the essential message of each book of the Bible.

Internet: As the worldwide web became more and more accessible to people all over the world, we decided to have a website for our church. This website has now become an amazing vehicle to reach people in many countries. At the right time, God gave us an excellent team of technically-skilled brothers to develop and maintain this website. Every week, we send out a short written message and put out a new video-message on this website. Many audio messages and all our books in English (and in a few other languages) are also available on this website. Everything is offered freely for anyone in the world to read, listen, watch or download. This has brought us in touch with many believers all over the world who are seeking for a godly life. In some countries, families who do not find a good church to attend in their hometown, have made our weekly video message their Sunday morning service at home – every week!

All praise be to God alone for what He has done.

CHAPTER 48 Looking Ahead.....

I face the future with total confidence because what is unknown to me is fully known to my heavenly Father. And He has planned every detail of my future life and ministry – taking into consideration every circumstance that I will ever face. Nothing takes Him by surprise – for He is God. And since my only desire in life is to please and glorify Him, I have no fear or anxiety about the future.

The *greatest truth* that God has taught me from the Bible is that *He loves me as much as He loved Jesus (Jn.17:23)*. And so He cares for me *as much as He cared for Jesus* too. Everything in Jesus' life was planned, down to the last detail, from His birth to His death. And God has planned my life also in exactly the same way. *“The Lord saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in His book! How precious it is to realize that the Lord **thinks so much about ME ! (Psa.139:16,17)***.

I have a bridal relationship with my Lord (as described in the *Song of Solomon*). This is a very personal, intimate and loving relationship. I live my life *“leaning upon my beloved Lord” (Song 8:5)*. And it is out of this relationship that my ministry flows. My Lord and I go to the harvest fields of the world together (*Song 7:11,12*). I have no desire to go to any place that He does not lead me to. I say, “Lord, You lead the way. Tell me where You are going and I'll come along with You. I will not choose where to go, on my own. And tell me also what to preach – and I will preach it.” And that is how I have served my Lord for these past many years.

My ministry therefore has never been a burden and I have no complaints about *anything*, or against *anyone* – not even against those who have betrayed me, maligned me or sought to harm me. I love them all, because my Saviour loves them all. And He has taught me to pray for those who seek to harm me, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.” My life and my times are in the Lord's hands. People could not harm Jesus or arrest Him *“until His hour had come” (Jn.7:30; 8:20)*. And no person or event can harm me *“until my hour comes”* either – and it is my heavenly Father Who determines that hour.

God has never allowed Satan to harass me beyond my ability to overcome, at any time (*1 Cor.10:13*). God has made me *“run against men”* first, and only then allowed me to run *“against horses” (Jer.12:5)*. And every trial that I have faced and overcome by God's grace, has only made me stronger. Thus I have been prepared to face even greater trials. My Christian walk has been an education – and trials have been the means by which God has promoted me to a higher class each time! God's grace has been sufficient in every situation I have faced thus far. And it will be sufficient for me in the future too. Thus I will complete my spiritual education on earth.

The Lord has given me a specific ministry to fulfil in his Body – primarily, to preach those particular Biblical truths that others are *not* preaching *and* also to expose the un-Scriptural and un-Christlike practices prevalent in Christendom today. And by God's grace, I shall fulfil that ministry until the very end.

I know that I will face opposition in my ministry. That is only to be expected. Paul did *not* have a persecution-mania when he wrote, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** be persecuted (2 Tim.3:12)*. He was facing reality – and was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted by the world, as He

was (*Jn.15:18-21*) – and Jesus was persecuted more by the *Jewish religious world* than by the secular world. So I know that I will be opposed more by *religious Christians* than by non-Christians. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus' ministry and criticized Him. Religious Christians will be jealous of my ministry too and will criticize me. Jesus was *accused of preaching false doctrine*. So will I be. Jesus was *taken to court* – by the Pharisees. So will I be – by religious Christians. Jesus' enemies were the members of *His own family* (*Jn.7:5*). So will mine be. Jesus said, “*Even those closest to you – your brothers and relatives – will betray you and have you arrested. You will be hated, because you are Mine.*” He also said, “*The religious world hates me, because I KEEP TELLING IT that its ways are evil*” (*Jn.7:7*). The only way a Christian can avoid such persecution is by keeping quiet. However the Lord's promise to me has been, “*Not a hair of your head will perish....No weapon turned against you shall succeed, and you will have justice against every courtroom lie. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord*” (*Lk.21:16-18; Isa.54:17-Living Bible*).

Some years ago, someone told me that a “*Satanist group*” in Bangalore was targeting me in their petitions to Satan. I had known for many years that Satan hated me – because I was a servant of God and a threat to Satan's kingdom. But I also knew that Satan could not touch me or my family, because I was living under the headship of a Christ Who defeated him on the cross. My family and I are surrounded by an army of angels and we are part of a powerful Body of believers who pray for us constantly.

The Lord told me recently, “*As you were once afraid of Satan, from now on Satan will be afraid of you, because I am with you.*” As Satan was afraid of Jesus, he will be afraid of us too if we walk in the light, because “*as Jesus is, so are we in this world*” (*1 Jn.4:17*). So we do *not* fear Satan at all.

The trials and difficult situations that the Lord has allowed me to face were all planned by Him to enable me to know His power and to experience His deliverance. It is in the face of opposition from men and demons, that I have tasted and seen the power of God in operation. And such experiences have enabled me to strengthen the faith of others too. Effective ministry comes not only through Bible-study and the anointing of the Spirit, but also through facing trials and overcoming them (*2 Cor.1:3-6*).

God has blessed me with an amazing family. He gave me a wonderful wife, who has great spiritual discernment and a very simple lifestyle. She has stood by me faithfully in my ministry, through all these 40 years of our married life. God also gave us four wonderful sons who love the Lord, and who love us and love the church too. And they are serving their generation today, by spreading the truths of God's Word that they saw in our lives and heard in our church.

God has also given me an anointed team of coworkers, who are elders in the churches in India and in other countries. They do an excellent job of shepherding their churches and have thus relieved me of many responsibilities, so that I can travel to other places and preach God's Word.

We are living in days of a famine of the prophetic word (as predicted in *Amos 8:11,12*). Fresh revelation on God's Word is very rare and most preachers are lovers of money. Believers in many groups are getting fed up with the boring sermons and the constant demands for money that they hear from their leaders every week. In such a time, God is raising up prophetic voices here and there, in many lands – and we praise God for this.

We are thankful for the privilege God has given us also, to have a small part in proclaiming the prophetic word of life to believers in many denominations. Some who

listen to our messages are preaching those very same messages in their own churches – churches that would never invite me to speak! Thus God has penetrated every man-made barrier. Our ministry is a very small part of the Body of Christ – but we want to fulfil the particular ministry that God has given us for this time.

My future path may be difficult or easy – I don't know. But God will choose what is best for me and I know He will “*always* lead me in His triumph” (2 Cor.2:14). And since He is always on my side against Satan, He will make me “*more than a conqueror*” in every situation.

Predestination means that my final *destination* has been *pre-determined* by God. That destination is not heaven but *total likeness to Christ* (Rom.8:29). Every day brings me closer to that destination. Praise the Lord!! And if the pathway to that destination leads through a little bit of suffering now on earth, I rejoice in it.

When I see my beloved Lord face to face, I want to hear Him say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”.

Amen!

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