

The Main Thing, Part I -- Personal Testimony

by Devern Fromke

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing, which means to focus on God's will and purpose in our lives, and to be willing to be dealt with by Him in order to be transformed and renewed.

Duration: 1:13:29

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:11

Topics: "Personal Testimony"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal journey of faith and how God has been faithful and patient with him despite his mistakes. He emphasizes the importance of keeping the main thing, which is the gospel, at the forefront of our lives. The speaker also highlights the need to rely on the life of Jesus during difficult times rather than relying on our own knowledge or the church. He mentions the concept of sacrificial love and social justice, emphasizing the importance of giving to the poor and sacrificing for the sake of others.

Transcript

Well, this is a privilege. I know you're excited about my being here, but I'm more excited about being here than you can realize. I've been looking forward to seeing some of you for a long time.

Some of you have changed a little bit. I really don't know. I often ask people to give their testimony, but when I'm asked to do it, that's another thing.

I've been praying for the last two or three days, asking how I could somehow focus something that wouldn't be on me, but would be beneficial and would focus our attention to the Lord Himself. And this is what I've come up with. I was with a friend of mine.

We had a conference back in Florence, Alabama a couple of months back. And he used a diagram that I'm going to use tonight. It's out of Richard Foster's book.

I don't know which book. I just borrowed it from Peter. So I'm going to use that as a way of explaining the history of God's dealing and working in my life.

And it'll show you how many times I've missed the way, and how faithful He's been, and how patient He's been. But I discover I'm not the only one. I'd like to use this title for what I want to say tonight.

I hunted for a Scripture verse. Usually you ought to have a Scripture verse. I couldn't find anything.

So this is what I want to talk to you about. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Should we say that all together or do you need to repeat it? The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Now the question is, what's the main thing? We'll talk about that Sunday. But I'm going to be getting around to it all these times together. What I want to say tonight basically has to do with the struggle and the longing of my heart all the time to be obedient to the Lord and to cut through to the main issues in life.

I like wholeheartedness. One thing I hate about somebody is a slowpoke dragging their feet. That's not me.

My wife and I, she's a little slower than I am. When we walk, we always got a problem. But I have a problem with a lot of people that are just sort of dragging their feet.

Because there's one thing that has been a desire in my heart, and that has been to be all out and wholehearted. It has problems though. It really does.

And you'll see it as we get along in our testimony tonight. What I want to do in this is to show you what I'm going to call, or what Richard Foster has called, the main stream or the river of God. And then we're going to see some areas here where we sort of get out of main stream.

And if we're not careful, get off and become a little eddy and a whirlpool out here. Lots of activity, but no progress. As I look back and I see the faithful dealing of the Lord and His working in my heart, I think that these six things really picture something of a struggle and a desire to really press on.

I have to say that I'm very grateful, first of all, that I was born into a family, a mother and dad who really loved the Lord. Mother reminded me for many years that when I was in the womb, she prayed. She prayed that I would become a servant of the Lord in her church.

And when I left, it was a real disappointment. You have no idea how she suffered. It was a good church, but I got off into college after having left South Dakota and went to Seattle where I entered a school that was of that denomination and got all the way through with a heart seeking God.

I look back at those early years as a boy growing up. We had what we called a fall and spring revival every year. And part of the frustration, the difficulty that I went through was I was back at the altar every fall and spring getting saved over and over again.

Some of you have never been through that. Some of you don't know what that involves. But I remember as a boy really longing to please the Lord and yet being typical and mischievous and all that went with it.

And each time I'd get up and I'd pound my fist and I'd say, pray for me that I can hold out to the bitter end, whatever that is. Well, I went through that in college as they had fall and spring revivals again. Never sure, never really sure of salvation.

And one day when God in His wonderful mercy showed me the grace of God that it wasn't my hanging on to Him to keep saved, but that He had taken hold of my hand and that which I had committed unto Him, He would keep against that day. The revelation of grace was a wonderful thing to my heart. The fact is that's all I spoke about for a long time, the grace of God.

And it keeps being wonderful. You'd have to have been through the background of what I went through and have realized the awful uncertainty. You know, I don't want to be light about this, but I actually got to the place where I said, Lord, I'll never be able to live this kind of life.

I'll never be able to hold out. All I need is ten minutes at the end to get right. You have no idea if there's any kind of honesty and sincerity.

You have no idea what a struggle it was. How could, you see, how could? Well, it all depended on me, but the grace of God was a wonderful thing when suddenly I realized that it's what He did, not what I was doing. So that was a shock to my mother when she discovered I believed that, and my dad.

But I look back and I see how God has led, God has directed through these years. After we graduated from college, I moved in Youth for Christ. I was on the West Coast, went to Salem, which was the capital of Oregon.

We were directing a serviceman's center just as the war was closing. And when the serviceman's center closed, we started a youth center. And I had privilege for three years of ministering in Salem as a Youth for Christ director.

We had large crowds of young people going into the high schools day after day in the five or six areas around. The strangest thing began to develop in the midst of this. There was something of God putting a deep hunger and a long in my heart for something besides activity.

You see, all I can remember is that I was performing to please God and to keep safe. That was before the revelation of grace had come to me. I was performing.

I was wanting to please God. And there was a tremendous desire. And then I got invited to a conference over on the coast.

We took the gospel team, quartet and trio. I had been on the radio as a speaker at the center there. And I still feel like it was a little bit of a put-up job.

I thought it was really wonderful to be invited as a conference speaker. I thought I'd kind of arrived to come to a big place and to be able to speak for the Labor Day weekend. But I'll never forget when I got there, the director of the conference came to me, and he said, we have two speakers for the weekend.

I'll have Brother Bill speak tonight, and you can speak tomorrow. That night, I sat in that group, and he put a mirror before us and began to show the works of the flesh from Galatians 5. And it was as though God put a mirror before me, and I saw myself as I had never seen myself before. It's hard to explain.

I was a good boy, clean, moral. I'd never gotten into a lot of things. I'd grown up in a good background.

Very careful. Of course, I lied and would cheat and steal and things like that. But, I mean, they were all little things.

That night, for the first time in my life, I saw what God saw of me. And it was an awful picture. It really was.

I remember sitting there thinking, and I've got to get up and speak tomorrow. Well, I went to the speaker. I hadn't met him before.

I went up afterwards, and I thought two speakers ought to buddy-buddy a little bit. He looked at me, and he said, Did God speak to you tonight? And I said, Wait a minute. To myself, I'm the other speaker.

He said, I don't think we should do much talking now. Let's just get alone and everybody be quiet before God. I got to my room that night, and I cried out, Oh, God, why did you bring me here, speaker at a business and professional women's conference? And I'm such a wretched, miserable mess.

I wrestled through the night. I didn't sleep. I went to the breakfast, and in the morning I turned to the director, and I said, You know, I didn't have a very good night.

Maybe I ought to have Bill speak again. He looked at me and said, That'll be fine. So then he loaded his second barrel and shot again.

All I guess I'm trying to say to you is, there comes an appointed hour in our lives when we quit playing, and God really breaks in and does something in our life. And that's what happened. After all these years in a Christian home, in church, going through a Christian college, suddenly at a conference, God dealt with my life.

That next morning was worse than the night before. He handed out a sheet of paper and had us write down all the things that He was talking about. And the Holy Spirit exposed my heart again.

I only tell you this because it's so real, even though it's, what would it be, forty-five years ago? It's so real to my heart tonight. You know when God really begins to deal in your life. Well, I wrestled all through the afternoon.

We were off, and I knew I had to speak that night. In the afternoon hours, I went through all the messages. I had a whole pile of things that I could, you know, a reservoir that I could share from.

But everything was empty. Everything was dull. And finally in my crying out, I remember saying, Oh Lord, give me a fresh word.

And He reminded me of the 23rd Psalm, that I could just start there and He would begin to unfold it. And I did that night. Never forget, the Lord is my shepherd.

And I looked out over that group and I said, I just will be honest with you, beginning tonight, I'm not sure He's ever been my shepherd before. But I have come to some decision these days I've been here. I grew up in South Dakota and I would take several hundred sheep up to the pasture.

I was always driving them. That's the way we did it in Dakota. And I said, I discovered that in the Bible lands, the shepherd went before and the sheep followed him.

But I've had to be driven all the way. And I just want you folk to know as I stand before you tonight, that for the first time that I can ever really be sure of, I can say, the Lord is my shepherd. He's not having to drive me.

I'm following Him. I shall not want. I've had a rather strange thing happen.

The day before we left to go to this conference, I was living in a home with some Christian friends. They had one bathroom and it's difficult to get in. I usually had to get to the center early.

Sometimes Bill would get in the bathroom and shave before I did. That particular morning I remember sitting out in the hallway in front of the bathroom door waiting to get in and I picked up the Sears Roba catalog. Just thumbing through pages, waiting for him to come out.

And as I looked up, Bill came out and he said, So, Vern, having your morning devotions? You don't know how true that was. My heart was so sticky, it wanted everything on every page. I didn't plan to tell you all that.

You know what happened that night? I just went on from phrase to phrase. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

Finally, the spirit of conviction was so heavy on me. I said, folk, I can't go on. I need to get down at the altar.

I'd always had a haunting suspicion that one day I'd be the first one at my own altar call. And I was. I remember kneeling in an old rough auditorium and I cried out, Oh God.

And I looked around and I believe everybody in the audience was on their face, weeping. God came in. And that was the first time I began to realize that in our obedience and honesty before God, so often He's able to deal with the hearts of others.

Because, I suppose, two or three hundred. Can you imagine a proud young man going to a business and professional women's meeting and doing that? I mean, getting down and saying, God, you need to save me first. That was my terminology.

You look at me strange. Are you following me? You couldn't because you've never been through anything like that. But it was an awful experience.

But I look back at that as a crisis time. It was a beginning point. You see, the very first thing that took place from that moment on, I came to realize that God wanted me to be a soul winner, evangelism, and the enlargement of that to a missionary outreach.

The first phase, the first emphasis of my life was an all out, buttoning everybody to make sure they were winning souls. And evangelism was very real. How many of you believe that's alright? I'm not tricking you.

Would you say that's alright? There needs to be more of an overflow, you see. God began to develop. Not only I was really sincere, but this became the main thing to me for quite a while.

If you're not winning souls, if your spirit isn't fervent, if you're not zealous in witnessing, if you're not living and finally it expanded, if you're not reaching out to a whole lost world, something's really wrong in your life. And I look back at those days. I just need to hasten through it and say, I look back at those days.

They were wonderful days. We were in Youth for Christ. Lots of young people met the Lord.

There was a zeal. There was a desire. I often wonder, do you think you'll get any Amway override for souls that you've won who've touched souls? Are you following? Are you there? Do you know what that is? Do you know what... Well, that's not the point, but it sure would be wonderful.

And then I began to see something. I came to realize that the reason a lot of people didn't want Jesus because there were too many Christians, too many folk whose lives didn't match up. You'd witness to

them.

You'd try to express something. They said, hmm, I don't want that. Even here today, a lot of folk would say, well, I sure love Jesus, but I don't know about all these kids.

You run into it all the time. And that led me to the next phase. The next thing that began to be emphasized, I began to say, well, Lord, evangelism, soul winning, missionary world outreach, and God has a wonderful way at this time.

But I began to realize that unless there was some holiness of life, unless there was some separation, those people who were more godly, He couldn't use them. So, about this time, the Holy Spirit began to work and revival began to come. I saw that if God could really empty, then He could fill.

So the emphasis for a whole period of time was one of a holiness of life, emptying. I sought holiness. That may be meaningful to you.

There's a lot of different kinds of emphasis in holiness, emptying, that you might be filled. And I thank God for all that I went through. But it was about this time that I came into some of the writings of Jesse Penn Lewis and the cross and identification.

I don't know how meaningful that is to you, but up to this time, everything had been cleansing of the old life. Now, for the first time, I saw that the real problem was me. It was I. It was that I needed to be dealt with.

And I went through a period there of really crying out, Oh God, how faithful You are to finally show me that the real root of the problem is the tree that needs to be dealt with. Have you ever read any of Jesse Penn Lewis and the work of the cross, the identification message? It's a very wonderful thing to me. I left the work that we'd been on the west coast in Youth for Christ and came back into the area where my parents had moved.

I remember saying goodbye. It was a lovely center we had built. I guess my heart was in it.

When I said goodbye, not knowing where I was going, just heading back, I took a long route from Salem down through San Diego and then finally back to Missouri. And one afternoon as I was on the bus reading, I remember the book. It was D. L. Moody's life story, *Bush o' Glow*.

And one little phrase came to my heart as I was reading. Where Moody had reached a crisis and he said, he'd read where the world, it said, the world has yet to see what God can do through one life that is wholly yielded to him. Moody looked up and he said, God, I'd like to be that individual.

The world has yet to see what God can do through one life that's wholly yielded to him. It's a trailways bus. We were out in the middle of Nevada someplace.

I remember laying the book aside and I knew that God filled me with his spirit. How did you know? Intuitively, I guess. I just sensed an anointing, something come upon my life.

We got back to where I was going to live with my parents. Mother invited me to speak to the young people's group at the little church where they were attending. To hasten the story, in the next months, revival broke out.

Went from that Presbyterian church to the Methodist, the Baptist churches all around. Went on for over 30 weeks. Church to church to church.

Now I hasten to tell you, I thought it was my preaching until I discovered a group of ladies had been praying for 21 years. God was answering their prayer. Anybody could have come in.

I was only one thing. I was obedient. Desperately obedient.

I remember standing in this little church. We'd been there for about a week. Speaking had never been any problem to me from high school and college days on.

You could always fill the air with words. But I'd made a promise to the Lord. I said, Lord, I'm not going to share unless you give me something.

Here was this church filled. I don't know why so many folk were coming, but it must have been a Sunday night. I stood up before the group that night and I said, You know, it's strange.

I've been speaking now for six or seven nights, but God hasn't given me any word tonight, and I don't know what we're going to do. But unless He tells me or gives me something to share, I don't plan to share. So you pray that He'll either give me something or give somebody else something.

I stood down front by the pulpit. I guess God had been working in many hearts. As I saw a brother from this side move way over to the other side of the church to another brother over there, they were getting some things right, and I saw them weep and grip one another.

And that struck the whole church because they knew they'd been at odds for years. In the next two hours, I saw God move in and revival. It began to deal in hearts.

Folk came up and said, The best night we've had is the night you didn't speak. Well, I'm not being honest. You see what I'm getting at? We have such a peculiar... I believe that God wants obedience, folk.

That's all I want, just obedience to the Lord. He was faithful. Well, that went on the next week, and the next week out in that little rural community, and then we were invited to come into the city to the bigger church, and then it moved from church to church.

But I only tell you that because Aunt Anne and six ladies had gathered for 21 or 23 years and been praying, and God answered. That was sort of a beginning. From that moment on, we began to get invitations to a lot of places, but it was during this time that moving from this emphasis, telling people that they needed to be cleansed and filled with the Spirit, then God brought the writings of Jesse Penn Lewis.

And I saw that the big problem in the church in my own life here, I'd been in Youth for Christ. We did lots of activity, lots of young people touched for the Lord. But you'd never guess the fellow you're looking at standing with a bow tie with lights on it, and I could turn a little battery and they would come on.

You'd never guess all the things I did to win young people. The end justified any means. Then when God began to put a mirror before me and say, they don't see anybody but you, Vern.

They're just modeling. You know what I mean? It's amazing how we can draw people to ourselves unwittingly. And I'd been doing it.

And I began to cry out. Then God made the cross very real to my life. All the energy, the work of the flesh, all that I'd been doing.

Lord, it's for your glory, but I sure enjoy the intention in the middle of it. You see what I mean? Have you ever really been to the cross? Have you ever faced what we call the message of identification that when Jesus died on the cross, I died there with Him? Nailed to the cross with Him? Buried in the tomb with Him? When we resurrect in newness of life, I come up in Christ on resurrection ground, a new man. I didn't understand all that that meant, but I knew one thing.

There was a proud young man that needed to die. Guess what I preached for the next five years? Folk, you've got to die. It wasn't very clear in a lot of it, but I saw the judicial and the objective.

I saw all the aspects. Then I met the president or the head of Prairie Bible Institute, L.A. Maxwell, who had written the book *Born Crucified*. If you haven't read that book, you ought to get it.

Is it just really? And the young people that I got acquainted with up there. That was a whole phase in my life. I thank God for it because while you move to different aspects of sanctification, different aspects of God purifying your life, the next thing that became very real to me about this time was what I found Mrs. Penn Lewis writing about.

And the best word I can know is to call it the vision of God's eternal purpose in Christ. It was a wonderful thing to suddenly discover that while God wanted to redeem humanity, that He had purposed something for His lovely Son that was beyond just being saved. For the first time, I would look at people and say, what would God have done if man hadn't fallen so He'd have somebody to save? Let me run that through again.

Salvation and redemption, however precious and wonderful, was the overshadowing thing in my life. But I'd look at people and say, wonder what God would have done if man hadn't sinned. Nobody to save.

Are you there? I suddenly began to see the whole of the purpose that God had in Christ. That which He'd begun with and that which is going to work. I didn't understand very much of it, but I did know this, that being saved and being holy wasn't the end.

That God had a purpose to work out in and through His Son. And those of us who were involved, I didn't see the church. I didn't know much about the church.

But I remember how wonderful it was to get a hold of it. And I think from that time on, the word purpose became my middle name. The purpose.

The eternal purpose. The purpose. The purpose.

My mother would say to me, don't you know anything but the purpose? I'd say, mother, that's what's needed. That's the missing note. And I believe it was.

This will interest a lot of you. In reading the *Overcomer*, any acquaintance with it? That dates so far back. Any with the old *Overcomer* that Mrs. Penn Lewis put out? Way, way back.

I remember reading in there in one of the early editions. She said in a very plaintive way that two men who had been with her from the beginning in the *Overcomer* message were leaving and were going on their own. And one of them was T. Austin Sparks.

The other was, I forget his name. And I remember, I was selling hundreds and hundreds of books and magazines of Mrs. Penn Lewis. And I remember bowing and saying, oh God, I don't know who this man Sparks is, but he's sure missing your way.

It was a real, because that's all I knew. The Overcomer. The Overcomer.

Can you imagine 20 years later when I sat with him one day and I said, long before I ever realized you'd be alive or that I'd meet you, I really prayed for you. I remember the afternoon we sat there and I explained to him. I said, remember when Mrs. Penn Lewis wrote in the Overcomer magazine just a couple paragraphs, two men who had been identified with the work.

You can just see him with his, yes brother, I remember. And then he told me, he said Mrs. Penn Lewis wanted to keep the victorious, the Overcomer message and interdenominational that moved around the world among all groups. And he said, I saw something of the church, the vessel, the corporate expression and the life flow that was going to come out of the church.

He said, it was a very bitter thing because, I'll give you his words, he said Mrs. Penn Lewis felt that I would be the one probably who would take over the ministry. He paid the price because he saw something more. The church as the vessel of expression of the life of the Lord.

And we sat. I remember weeping. I said, oh, I'm so glad you're not as bad as I thought you were.

After that, of course, I knew better. Are you following? After the Wabana days, he came to Indianapolis, you know. I think it was five years.

We'd spend a whole week in our home. Mrs. Sparks and my wife would be out in the kitchen just going like this. He and I would have wonderful fellowship for a couple hours.

We didn't have to talk all the time. I remember him saying one day, I'm so glad I'm getting acquainted with somebody who doesn't have to talk. Are you following what I'm getting at? Well, maybe not.

Anyway, can you see now that what I'm trying to say tonight is here is an emphasis that the church needs. You think it's possible for some poke to get off here in an eddy and go round and round as though that's the only thing? Or somebody over here to get in an eddy? I believe that there is a refreshing that can come. And I believe that in all of these things, God keeps saying to me, here is something that's needed in the stream, the body of life, but it needs to have its proper perspective.

Well, the next is touchy, but I'll go into it anyway. Having seen all of this, we'd started the fellowships back in Missouri. Our desire was a New Testament church, a purity of church.

We started a boot camp, built 13 buildings, training young people to come in. See, about this time I got acquainted with a missionary group. I just named them.

It was called New Tribes. They didn't believe that you needed to qualify the flesh, that you could make rugged disciples, you could bring people through quickly to the work of the cross in their life and thrust them out to the field. And I worked with this group teaching at their boot camp for quite some time.

Never ceased to thank God for the vision of a lost world. It keeps growing in my heart all the time. I think you'll sense that before we get through this weekend.

It was at the close of the war. MacArthur had brought Japan to surrender and he asked for, what was it, 10,000 missionaries to come to Japan? And I responded. I was with the group.

Responded to go to Japan. Had a military permit, visa, bags all packed. Said goodbye to the folk in Missouri.

I was on the West Coast in ministry and meetings and was hit head on in an automobile accident. But for the grace of God, would have died. Young man was drinking, had stolen a car, was making a getaway.

We lost control of the car. We came over a big viaduct. Hit my car head on.

I had a brother traveling with me. Two missionaries. There we were in four lanes of traffic.

The car caught fire almost immediately. Thankfully, there were people stopping. They couldn't get by.

They got the fire out and lifted. It was his car that caught. Lifted the car away.

All of us were unconscious in that car. About a week later in the hospital, I remember gaining consciousness. Found out that one of the missionaries in the outside seat who had been in the Korean revival, her life had been such a tremendous blessing to my heart.

I could go on for an hour about Daisy. How God had used her in the field in Korea and then at home. Now she was with the Lord.

My scalp was laid back. My arm broken. They took part of my kneecap out.

My back was broken. I tuned in on the radio. We'd been in ministry there quite a little in the Yakima Valley.

Overheard one of the station men saying, the prayer vigil for Frankie and the party is going on 24 hours. It had spread up and down the coast. Conditions and I remember the details.

I wasn't expected to live. Quite a thing to tune in and listen to. But God.

My eyes were bandaged. They said I, probably this eye would sympathize with it. I would be blind.

But God. About a week later, I heard a voice over me. A man came in.

He said he'd hitchhiked from Portland all the way to Yakima, 150 miles. Had flat tires and had to leave his car only to get to the door and have my mother stand there and say nobody gets in. The doctors had said no company.

He said God sent me. Pushed her aside. That's all I remember him saying.

And he said God has given me a gift of healing and I've come to pray for you. Well, I was sort of, you know, in and out of a stupor. Didn't mean much.

He prayed and then he vanished. Don't know who it is. Never saw him again.

But I have to tell you that God from that moment on began to, a recovering work. They were going to put a plate in this arm because it was so badly fractured. They had already taken part of my kneecap out.

They were getting ready for, I won't go into the details. God touched my body and brought me back. What's more wonderful, it was about this time a lady slipped in who said she'd come from Seattle.

A friend of hers had been listening on the radio. I guess had heard us when we were ministering and then heard about the accident. And she said my friend has composed a song that's been a blessing to many people.

Here's an autographed copy. She sent me over to sing it for you. She heard that your eyesight was in question.

Never forget, as the lady said, you may not have heard of Helen Lemel, but she wrote, Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. I'd heard the song because I had sung it on occasion.

Now I had an autographed copy. And then she told me as she stood there, she said, you know, Helen Lemel has been blind all through these years from the time she was five or six. She's been blind.

And in the midst of it, Helen has prayed for one thing all the time. Oh God, if I don't have physical eyes, let me have spiritual eyes. And I'll never forget when I heard her singing, my heart looked up.

I said, oh God, if I'm going to be blind, if I'm not going to be able to see, I thank you for sending this sister to remind me that spiritual eyes are more important. I claim spiritual eyes and eye salve. That's very real to me.

But God, I believe, touched and healed. And I'll explain it. This is an interesting note.

It would be about 15 years later, I was in Switzerland one day with Brother Sparks. And you'd have to be with the group there to know that everybody was in order just like you're sitting here. And the pianist was sitting at the piano waiting for the chimes to go off at the church at one o'clock for the one o'clock meeting.

And then it would start. We waited every day for that little episode. And that day, the other secretary stood up and said, Brother Sparks has asked me to sing for you his favorite song today.

And she started to sing, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. I got up to speak a moment later and I said, oh Brother Sparks, that's interesting. I never met Helen Lemel, but I have an autographed copy.

I thought I was on the end, you know. Until he got up and he said, Brother, I knew her. Not only did I know her, he said, one time when I was visiting later in California, I got a phone call and she said, Brother Sparks, I need for you to come over and help me.

When he got there, he said, she was told by the doctors that it's very possible that with the new kind of eye surgery, they could bring her eyesight back. With his quivering voice, he said, she wanted me to tell her what to do. And we prayed together, fellowship together.

Then he said, her choice was this. She said, maybe if I had physical eyesight, I'd lose my spiritual eyesight. And she opted against it.

And his concluding words were, there's something better than healing. Did you hear that? I love to tell charismatics out all over the country. I'm not being catty now.

Did you hear that? There is something better than healing. What is it? What is it? Well, the healer himself. I'm way off my story.

Anyway, this will go on for hours. I came at this time to realize that the purpose of God in Christ would be realized as lives were dedicated, as they were holy unto the Lord. But did you ever look out in situations and feel totally helpless? You see the problem? Well, you can get into churches and you see such desperate needs.

I mean desperate needs and say, oh God, oh God, what's needed is for You to expose and uncover. And I came out of this accident with all of the questions. With the brother that I was with at that time, we began to say, God, we've had some revival, but things are fading.

What's next? And I remember him whispering to me one day and saying, what you really need is more of the Holy Spirit. More than I thought when I had him, I had him. He said, no, there's a difference between the indwelling spirit and the outpoured spirit.

A difference between the fullness of the indwelling spirit and the outpoured spirit. Now this is delicate, stay with me. I'm not radical, I'm just a little different.

And I began to cry out, oh God, what do you mean? What do you mean? And for the first time in his own way, we began to move in among folk that were emphasizing power for service. Back in those days, there was a real break from the Pentecostal movement. It was called the Latter Rain.

Now that's too old for most of you, but they were an unusual group. And the thing that was so different about them was they emphasized proper church order. All the things... You see, in the meantime in here, I had moved in among the Plymouth Brethren.

Revival here. And we began to see the Brethren and the structure of the church. It was very wonderful.

Except that you can have all the order without any life or enablement. You can know all about the gifts, but not have them operating. And so, little by little, I found myself reaching out and saying, oh God, if there is an anointing, if there is the outpoured Spirit, if there is more gifting that You can work out in my life, I'm available.

Now remember, it had been through revival. God had been dealing. We'd come to some of these areas.

There's something about man that's always saying there must be more. Anybody ever said that beside me? God, I've had the latest experience and after a while there must be... Now that's alright, because all the rest of your life you'll be discovering that. Even after you get my latest experience I'm going to talk about.

I'm kidding you now. Are you following? What is the more that we really want? It's just Himself. You see? And I'm not belittling, but I'm just simply saying that there came a time when I began to cry out, oh God, oh God, I thank You for what I've seen of the cross.

Thank You for the working of death. These things I never forget. But Lord, maybe there is something more.

And my heart was really open. But I lived near Springfield, Missouri and that's the world headquarters of the most radical people. And I didn't want anything to do with all that emotion because I'm generally

speaking a cautious, quiet German.

You don't believe that, but that's true. Very cautious, very conservative. But very recklessly, I began to say, oh God, I'd be willing to become a Pentecostal even though I know they're wrong.

They don't know the cross. They don't know this and this. They don't know the eternal purpose.

Are you following? There comes times in your desperation. People who lay hands on me, they say, just like a stone, you can't help a fundamentalist. But one day in the woods when I was all alone, one day all alone, the dam sort of opened and God gave me a prayer language that I wasn't particularly seeking, just wanting to worship Him.

Now I lost a lot of you, but that's alright. It was really something. Never told anybody for two or three years.

But there would be times when the overflow and the desire to just worship and minister to the Lord and there was an enablement. But I never told, never told. I don't think anybody knew about it.

One day we heard of a great conclave up in Battleford, North Carolina. Six of us drove up 3,000 miles to this place and never forget it. In the background, there had always been openness and yet some hidden reservations.

I knew too much of the cross, too much of the eternal purpose to give room. And it was in the midst of a great big auditorium, 2,500 people. Very conservative group.

The song leader was leading and stopped after a song or two and he said, I feel led to give a message. And he spoke forth very fluently in what I felt was Ukrainian or Yugoslavian or it was a language in lower Europe. I nudged the pastor next to me and I said, that's someplace in, it's a guttural language.

He no more was through and about two or three minutes later, we heard a weeping in the back of the audience to shorten the story. Somebody there after the war had come from the Ukraine area and that day, his name, his history, his background, everything about him was exposed and he was told by the message in his language to repent. There he was, falling on his face before the Lord.

I saw that and heard it. A lot of my prejudice. You don't know how much prejudice I'd had.

How much fear, you know what I mean? Well, that whole group of people just moved into a time of worship and praise. Very interesting. And for the first time in my life, I had a language and I knew it was a Chinese dialect.

Say what you want to. The brother next to me nudged me. Godly brother.

We'd been together. He said, hmm, Chinese. Going to China someday? I remember him saying that.

Never done it before. Never done it since. God has wonderful ways of breaking prejudice.

That afternoon service closed. I'd been sitting toward the front. A little lady came to me and said, there's a sister back here who wants to see you.

I walked back. Wheelchair. Very godly, queenly lady.

White hair. Looked at me and she said, I don't know who you are, but you remember when everybody was worshiping and praising the Lord and there were many different languages? I said, yes. She said, I saw you in a Chinese garb preaching to Chinese.

200 feet away, I had been speaking in a Chinese. Are you following? That was the way God melted my prejudice. So, I spent some time here in a whirlpool.

Emphasizing, let's be honest with you, what you all need is more gifts and more power. Remember those days, Llewellyn? Frank? Yeah, we all do. And I have to say to you honestly, I'm not disappointed that I went through it, but I'm glad I've gone through it.

Because it's not the thing. Now, remember we were talking about the main thing is to keep the what? The main thing, the... And I hope you get the main thing before it's all over with. What is the main thing? Well, I need to hasten on.

There could be an hour on each of these. It was about this time I began to realize... I know Richard Foster puts it this way. He calls the next emphasis... You see, the church world today is pretty largely divided into main emphases.

How many of you know there's a whole evangelical world? How many of you know there's a whole holiness world? How many of you know there's a whole charismatic Pentecostal world? How many of you know there's another world that we call social justice out here? What do you mean by social justice? Well, you can put its emphasis in different ways, but it actually amounts to how much of the kingdom can we experience right now? How much kingdom and authority and power can you have now? There are those who say, wait till Jesus comes. He alone can establish the kingdom and set it all up. And that's comfortable, because all you have to do is wait.

Except that every now and then, every now and then, God does break into this human scene and authority, and there's a little more kingdom and authority exercise than how much. I'm going to ask you the question, how much kingdom and authority can we exercise now? There's some people who say, it isn't even necessary for Jesus to come back. We just set up the kingdom and take over and invite Him back.

There's lots of the extremes. And I'm not in either extreme, but I have to say to you tonight, I believe, and I think I could find enough of Watchman Nee's writings to back up what I'm saying, which would make it right. How much kingdom and authority do you want now? Well, God in His wisdom, and I know the Lord Jesus is going to come back, and when He comes back, He's going to be a remnant of people prepared.

I believe all of that. But I believe in our homes and in our communities and our areas around. Maybe there's a lot more spiritual authority that could be exercised than we'd like to, than we do.

I really believe that, folk. And you can go to lots of different extremes in this. We have in our fellowships back in central Indiana, we have some people that are born with this.

They're the ones every time the abortionists, they're out on the streets. Are you following what I'm trying to say? How many of you know what social... That is, God, can't you move into this present scene and upset a little bit of it and let us be felt as Christians? Or are we just passively waiting for Jesus to come? I just have to say this tonight. I am convinced that there's more of authority that can be manifest.

I'd like to give you some illustrations, but that'd be the distraction of the night. Anyway, I need to move on. Finally, we come to what Foster calls the contemplationists.

Contemplation. I would like to call this union life. How many of you believe that you can experience a life union with the Lord Jesus? And in fellowship, and in relationship with Him, a life union, God can give you understanding, He can release truth.

How many believe that most of us need a real, more of a life union? Is that meaningful to you? It ought to be because I know where you are. I really believe. This is a tremendous aspect.

The difficulty that I find with it is while I'm spending my time abiding in the Lord and contemplating, pretty soon you can almost enjoy the contemplation and the abiding and become passive. You know the two extremes here, the pietists and the quietists. Now, we're neither of those.

We're in the middle, aren't we? What is the middle? Going to get into that. You follow what I'm trying to say tonight? My struggle, Mac, my struggle all through the years has been, oh God, I want reality. I don't care what the cost is.

I don't care how lonely it gets. And it's gotten lonely at times when I've really been extreme. I don't care how lonely it gets, but I want to press on to a fullness of reality.

And I think I might be looking at some people tonight whom God has wrought that same sort of pressing on to the fullness. Amen? Well, I could stop here and say if you just know the abiding life, that's all that really matters. Because, folk, if some difficult days come, if some real difficult days come, it isn't how much of the church we know.

It isn't how much we know. It's how much we can draw from the life of the Lord Jesus. I remember when Brother Kong came back from China after his visit.

Met the folk there after what, 28 years he'd been away? He came into our area and one thing stuck. And he said, folk, I'll put it in my own words, I saw in a whole new way that the people who stand in the midst of communist takeover and crisis, it's those who know the abiding union, the life of the Lord. John 15.

Never forget it. There's difficult days ahead. Now, let's take a little vote tonight.

Which of these six would you like to vote as the main thing? Are you there? Do I have anybody who would say, Brother Vern, I opt for this one. Another says, I opt for this and this and this and this and this. What's the main thing? I said I'd close at nine and I will.

Come back tomorrow. How many of you think you know what the main thing is? The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Now, everybody says, I know what the main thing is.

And some are very extreme. Do you believe that if our life is centered and occupied with the Lord Himself, He can move in and bring evangelism and world vision in? He can make all that He is Himself and the holiness of life? How many believe that He who desires to enable and gift you will give every gift, everything that's needed if you what? Occupy it. Are you there? How many believe that even though you hear all the calls, you aren't out marching, you are not doing this, God just may slip in and say, you don't need all those luxurious things that you have.

I just believe that there is a lot more in this social justice area. When I heard Mother Teresa being interviewed, you know I had prejudices, not knowing her background and so forth. But when this Christian reporter, I didn't know him, but I knew of him, turned to her and said, Mother Teresa, do you have any goals or ambitions in life? She put her head down.

She didn't want to put the poor fellow down. But she whispered and she said, oh yes, I have a goal. It's Him.

I thought, that's a Catholic speaking. And that's too short an answer. He said, well Mother Teresa, what is love? Surely you've spent some time.

What is love? She said, oh yes, love is giving until it hurts, and then you keep on giving, no matter how much it hurts. He asked her one more question. And you could sense all the way through, she was saying one thing, you know what it was? I don't want to talk about me.

That's not important. Let's talk about... And what I thought would be a 15 minute interview was about three minutes long. The poor fellow was really frustrated.

But here's an individual who was really sacrificed. Do you know who I'm speaking of? How many of you think that when it comes to social justice, if we were to write a key word here, we could say that it would be sacrifice? Sell all that you have and give to the poor. Not just out of principle, but if we're really sensitive to the Lord.

I'll close. I was going to write down the key word of each of those, but you can do that in your own time. What are you trying to say tonight? Well, there's been a history and a struggle all through these years.

If I've learned any one thing is that the thing I thought was main turned out not to be the main thing. Because God has a way of bringing us back. And I'm not totally sure, though I'm pretty much convinced I know the main thing.

And we'll get to it. How many of you have been in a little whirlpool? Spent some time going round and round? This is wonderful folk. We're really going someplace.

And here's the stream. I don't want to be misunderstood. Not one of these things would I put down tonight.

Not doing that. I'm just trying to say that however good things may seem to be, God's doing a lot bigger thing than we realize. And the whole Christian world is divided into camps, exposing one another.

And I've been so guilty. Emphasizing. And I appreciate your open hearts because I think you've sensed that in the midst of my own longings there's always this cry, Oh God, I don't want to finish the race and discover I put the emphasis on the wrong thing.

I really miss it. Father, tonight I want to thank You for the privilege of trying to share a history and a background, all the various things that have been an emphasis at times. I have to honestly say Lord, I thank You for allowing me to taste these various areas, the reality.

I thank You tonight. And I look out over a group that are gathered and I believe we can say with one voice, Oh Lord, Oh Lord, don't let us settle down. Don't let us be complacent.

Don't let us assume if we are. But give us the larger sense of what it means to be in flow and in life with You. Hear the cry of all our hearts tonight, Lord.

Thank You for giving discernment to distinguish the things that really differ. Things that seem so much alike, yet they really are not. Oh, I thank You, Lord.

And I just pray that in the midst of tomorrow night and Sunday, You can do something in a new way to grip us. We want to be an enlarged people. I want to be.

A people, Lord, with a larger vision of what You're wanting to do and how You're doing in this closing hour. We thank You for this. So Lord, we just leave this word with You now and pray that You'll encourage hearts.

We ask this in Jesus' name, with thanksgiving. And everybody said, Amen.

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