



DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

DAVID BRANDT BERG

DARE to be DIFFERENT

by David Brandt Berg

edited by Phillip Sherwood and Keith Phillips
second edition

A Mountain Streams book

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Introduction

God is different. His children are *supposed* to be different—and they are supposed to *make* a difference. These are the central themes of ***Dare to Be Different***, a collection of inspirational essays that are sure to challenge and strengthen the reader's faith.

God's ways are not man's ways, the Bible tells us.¹ Citing numerous biblical examples, David Brandt Berg pictures our Creator as an iconoclast, frequently at odds with the status quo His creations have created for themselves.

Dare to Be Different also points us to God's never-ending, all-encompassing, unconditional and personal love for each of us—the only thing that can truly satisfy our souls, transform our lives, and provide a rock-solid foundation for our faith.

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”² The author maintains that the love of God is the greatest force in the world today—greater than all the forces of evil combined—and that it is the Christian's duty to share God's love with others.

Holding up Jesus Christ as the ideal role model and His teachings as the how-to, Berg challenges us to let

¹ Isaiah 55:8

² | John 4:8

our faith make a real difference in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Dare to Be Different will appeal to believers of all ages, backgrounds and cultures, regardless of religious affiliation; to those searching for truth, as well as those who want to more fully understand God's love and ways. It presents important Christian truths in an easy-to-understand and heartfelt manner. And most of all, it leaves us with the conviction that no matter what our circumstances, we can help change the world!

The Editors

A Declaration of Love!

As Christians, we believe in love!—Love for God and others, for “God is love.”¹ That’s our religion—love!

Love is everything, for without love there is nothing: no friends, no caring families, no loving fathers or mothers or children or happiness or Heaven. There could be none of these without love! And none of these could exist without God, for God is love.

Love is the primary solution to all of man’s problems of today, as well as those of the past—true love, the love of God and the love of fellow man. This is still God’s answer, even in such a complex and confused society as that of the world today.

It is people’s rejection of the love of God and His loving laws that causes them to be selfish and cruel to their neighbor—man’s inhumanity to man, which is so apparent in today’s weary world with all of its

¹ | John 4:8

enslavement by oppression, tyranny and exploitation. Hundreds of millions suffer needlessly from hunger and malnutrition, disease and ill health, poverty, overwork and abuse, not to mention the tortures of war and nightmares of perpetual fearful insecurity. All of these evils are caused by people's lack of love for God and each other, as well as their defiance of God's laws of love, faith, peace, and harmony.

The solution is so simple: If we truly love God, we can love each other. We can then follow His rules of life, liberty and the possession of happiness, and all will be well and happy in Him!

This is why Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love—to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And the second is “like it”—it's almost equal, almost the same: “You shall love your *neighbor* as yourself.”¹

“Who *is* my neighbor?” a lawyer of religious law asked Jesus, wanting to justify his own lack of love for certain people. What he really meant was, “Tell me exactly who I have to love, so I know who I *don't* have to love.” Jesus then responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, in which He showed that our neighbor is *anyone* who needs our help, regardless of their race, creed, color, nationality, social position or ethnic background:

¹ Matthew 22:37,39

“A certain [Jewish] man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite [temple assistant], when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan,¹ as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

“On the next day, when he [the Samaritan] departed, he took out two denarii [two days’ wages], gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he [the lawyer] said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”²

If we have real love, we can’t face a needy situation without *doing* something about it. We can’t just pass by the poor man on the road to Jericho. We

¹ The Samaritans were inhabitants of Samaria, a territory in central Palestine neighboring Judea (Judah). Because they were of mixed race, orthodox religious Jews despised and shunned them.

² Luke 10:30–37

must take action like the Samaritan did. Many people today say of those who need help, “Oh, I’m so sorry, how sad.” But *compassion* must be put into *action*! That’s the difference between *pity* and compassion: Pity just feels sorry; compassion *does* something about it!

We must demonstrate our faith by our works, and love can seldom be proven without some tangible manifestation. To say you love someone and yet not try to help them physically in whatever way they may need—food, clothing, shelter and so on—this is not love! True, the need for real love is a *spiritual* need, but it must be manifested *physically*, in works—“faith working through love.”¹ “For whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”²

However, we must always remember that the *greatest* manifestation of our love is not the mere sharing of our material things and personal possessions, but the sharing of *ourselves* with others, along with our love and our faith. Jesus Himself had nothing material to share with His disciples, only His love and His life, which He gave for them and for us, that we too might have life and love forever.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay

¹ Galatians 5:6

³ John 15:13

² 1 John 3:17–18

down one's life for his friends."³ So we consider that the sharing of ourselves, our love and our life with others, is the greatest of all sharing and our ultimate goal.

This is why God created us to begin with: to love and enjoy Him forever, and to try to help others do the same. It was *God* who created love and gave us the need to love and be loved, and He alone can satisfy the deepest yearning of every human soul for total love and complete understanding.

Although the temporal things of this earth can satisfy our bodies, only God and His eternal love can ever fill that aching spiritual void in each of our hearts, which He created for Himself alone. While human love is a wonderful part of God's plan and partially satisfies the heart, the human spirit, that intangible personality of the *real* you that dwells within your body, can never be completely satisfied with anything less than utter union with the great and loving Spirit that created it.

God is the very Spirit of love itself, true love, everlasting love, love that never ends from a Lover who *never* leaves, the Lover of all lovers, God Himself.

He's pictured in His Son, Jesus, who *came* for love and *lived* in love and *died* for love that we might live and love forever. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."¹

¹ John 3:16

Jesus came to love the people of the world, and He calls us to do likewise in every facet of our lives.

T rue happiness is found not in personal pursuit of selfish pleasure and satisfaction, but in finding *God* and giving His love to others and bringing *them* happiness. Do that, and then happiness will pursue, overtake and overwhelm you personally, without your even seeking it for yourself!

“For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”¹ If you *sow* love, you’re going to *reap* love. If you sow friendship, you’re going to reap friendship. So obey God’s laws of love—unselfish love, love for Him and others. Give others that love which is their due, and so shall you also receive. “Whatever measure you use to give—large or small—will be used to measure what is given back to you.”²

Find out what wonders love can do. You’ll find a whole new world of love you have only dreamed of! There are wonders of love that you can enjoy along with some other lonely soul—if you will only try! If you *give* love, you will *get* love.

Love wasn’t put in your heart to stay.
Love isn’t love till you give it away!

¹ Galatians 6:7

² Luke 6:38 TLB

“What Manner of Man Is This?”

He came to Earth as a tiny, weak and helpless baby, born to a simple, humble young girl who miraculously conceived the child, having never slept with any man. In fact, the news of her pregnancy was so shocking that when the man to whom she was engaged to be married learned about it, he decided to break the engagement and call off the wedding—until a powerful celestial being intervened and instructed him to stay with her and raise this very special child.

Although ordained and predestined to be a *king*, in fact the King *of* kings, He was not born in a palace with illustrious members of the court in attendance. Instead, He was born on the dirty floor of a barn amidst cattle and donkeys, and laid to sleep in the animal’s feed trough.

His birth brought no recognition, honor, or great fanfare from the institutions and governments of His

day. However, that night on a nearby hillside, a motley group of poor shepherds were awestruck as a brilliant, almost blinding light burst upon them from the starry sky and a host of angels filled the night with their heavenly declaration and song: “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth to men of good will! For unto you this day is born a *Savior*, Christ the Lord!”

Far away in the East, another herald appeared in the heavens. A bright star caught the attention of certain wise men, who interpreted its meaning and followed it. The star led them across hundreds of miles of desert to the little town of Bethlehem, where they honored the young child with their precious gifts.

His earthly father was a carpenter, a humble hewer of wood, with whom He lived and labored. He conformed to our human ways of life, customs and language, that He might understand and love us better and communicate with us on the lowly level of our limited human understanding. He learned to love mankind. He saw our suffering and had great compassion on us. He longed to not only heal our sick and broken bodies, but also to save our immortal spirits.

When the time came to begin His life’s work, He went about everywhere doing good—helping people, caring for children, healing heart-aches, strengthening tired bodies, and saving all who believed in Him. He not only preached His message,

but He *lived* it amongst the people. He ministered not only to people’s spiritual needs, but He also spent a great deal of time tending to their physical and material needs, miraculously healing them when they were sick and feeding them when they were hungry, all the while sharing His life and His love.

His religion was so simple that He said you must become as a little child to receive it. He didn’t advocate temple worship; He didn’t preach going to synagogue or church. He didn’t advise people to observe any complicated ceremonies or difficult rules. All He did was teach love and show love as He strove to lead God’s children into the true Kingdom of God, where the only laws are to “love the Lord with all your heart” and “love your neighbor as yourself.”

He had very little to do with the hypocritical, pompous, rich-robed, religious leaders of that day except when they insisted on annoying Him with their critical questions. Then He would rebuke them publicly and expose them as the “blind leaders of the blind” that they were. He went so far as to compare them to whitewashed sepulchers which indeed appear beautiful, clean and holy on the *outside*, but *within* are full of rotteness, corruption and stinking dead-men’s bones!

He was not a mere religious reformer, He was a *revolutionary!* He refused to compromise with the false religious system, but rather worked

totally outside of it. He shared His message and love with the poor and common folk, most of whom had long ago abandoned and been abandoned by organized religion.

He never went into any bar with whip in hand, breaking up the bottles and throwing out the bartender. Nor did He ever enter any brothel, beating up the poor girls, overturning their beds, and throwing the men out the window. But He *did* condemn the religious leaders for turning the temple, which was supposed to be a house of prayer, into a den of thieves! Twice He even made a whip, went into the temple, overturned their tables, spilled their money, and drove the money-mad moneychangers out!

He made Himself of no reputation, and was a companion of drunks and prostitutes, publicans and sinners—the outcasts and downtrodden of society. He even told them that they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven before the so-called “good” people, the self-righteous and the religious leaders who rejected Him and His simple message of love. The power of His love and appeal was so great and gave such great faith to the sincere truth-seekers that many didn’t hesitate to leave everything they had to immediately follow Him!

Once, while crossing a large lake with His disciples, a great storm arose which threatened to sink the boat they were in. He commanded the winds and the waves to cease—and immediately

there was a great calm. His disciples, astonished by such a demonstration of miraculous power, exclaimed to one another, “What manner of man *is* this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

Throughout His ministry He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansed lepers and raised the dead. In fact, so marvelous were His works that they prompted a leading member of the religious establishment that bitterly opposed and resented Him to exclaim, “We *know* that You are come from God, for no man could do these miracles that You do unless God were with him!”

As His message of love spread and His followers multiplied, the envious leaders of the religious establishment realized what a threat this formerly unknown carpenter had become to them. His simple doctrine of love was destroying their entire religious system by *liberating* the people from their power and control.

These powerful enemies ultimately had Him arrested and brought to trial on false charges of sedition and subversion. And though the Roman governor found Him innocent, he was pressured and persuaded by these religionists to execute Him.

Just prior to His arrest, this Man, Jesus Christ, had said, “They couldn’t even touch Me without My Father’s permission. If I would but raise My little finger, He would send legions of angels to rescue

Me!” But instead, He *chose* to die, to save you and me. Nobody took His life from Him; He laid it down. He *gave* His life of His own free will and accord.

But even His death did not satisfy His jealous enemies. To ensure that His followers couldn’t steal His body and claim He’d come back to life, they placed a huge stone over the door of His tomb and posted a group of Roman soldiers there to guard it. This was a scheme that proved futile, as these same guards became eyewitnesses to the greatest miracle of all. Three days after His lifeless body was laid to rest in that cold tomb, Jesus *rose* from the dead, the victor over death and Hell forever!

Death itself could not stop His work or His words! He rose to lead His tiny band of followers to ultimate victory—to overthrow the Roman Empire with love and the power of the Gospel! The love of God simply rolled right on over His jealous enemies like a giant tidal wave to cover the whole earth, and they were left far behind, as dead and dry as He predicted they would be!

Since that miraculous day nearly 2,000 years ago, this same Man, Jesus Christ, has done more to change history and the course of civilization and the condition of man than any other leader, group, government or empire. He has saved *billions* from the death of a hopeless, frightening tomb, and has given eternal life and the love of God to all who call upon His name.

This Man, Jesus Christ, is not merely a philosopher or teacher or rabbi or guru, or even a prophet. He is the Son of God!

God, the great Creator, is a Spirit and is all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere and in everything—far beyond our limited human comprehension. So He sent Jesus, in the form of a man, to understand us and show us what He Himself is like and to bring us to Himself. And though many great teachers have spoken and taught about love and about God, Jesus is love and He is God! Jesus is the only one who died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead. He is in a class all by Himself, because He is the only Savior. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”¹

If you haven't yet experienced God's love in Jesus, you can right now. See page 94 to find out how.

¹ John 14:6

The War of the Worlds!

— A call to action for all those who truly wish to change the world for the better!

Each of us who has answered Jesus' call to follow His example and bring His light to others is engaged in a war of the worlds!

We are fighting together for our faith, for truth, and for freedom—freedom from want, freedom from bondage, freedom from pain, freedom from evil and freedom from fear.

We are determined that the poor of the world shall have sufficient food, clothing and housing, and that they are enabled to labor in freedom, peace, health and happiness to obtain their needs. We have dedicated our all that everyone may be free to live lives of happiness together in cooperation, from each according to his ability and unto each according to his need.¹ These are some of our common goals.

¹ 2 Corinthians 8:14

Mankind cannot be happy when suffering from hunger, malnutrition, disease and ill health. Mankind cannot be fulfilled when enslaved by oppression and tyranny, or overworked and exploited. Mankind cannot be satisfied when suffering from the horrors of war and constant strife, and the nightmares of perpetual fearful insecurity.

We believe that all of these evils are caused by people's lack of love for God and each other, and their defiance of His laws of love and faith and peace and harmony. These laws are basic to the faith of every true believer in God and His love.

Apart from knowing what we are fighting for and against, we must also know how we must fight. Ours is not a war of physical weapons and armies and bodies of men. This is not a fleshly war pitting man against man, nation against nation, race against race, rich against poor, socialism against capitalism. This is not a war between political and economic systems, societies, tribes and cultures, religions and faiths. This is not a war of hate and bitterness, killing and slaughter, revenge and vindictiveness, torture, dying and death. This is not a war for the possessions and lands and pride of man!

Such carnal wars of man have seldom ever settled anything or solved the basic problems of mankind. They have usually only resulted in more suffering, more agony, more pain, more hunger, more slavery, more bitterness, more vengeance, more fighting, more

torture, more privation, more destruction, more waste, more poverty and more death! Most of man's selfish, evil wars end in a mere exchange of masters and slaves, a vicious never-ending cycle of horror, resulting in fewer and fewer rich and more and more poor, all of them miserable with their lives of fear and death.

Ours is a war of the *spirit*, in *faith* and *love*, to win the minds and hearts and to save the souls of men. Ours is a war to free men from the evils of the spirit and mind and heart that cause them to be selfish, unloving and cruel to each other. Man has little knowledge of the love, faith, and power of God, or of the loving laws that God designed for our eternal happiness.

Ours is a war to free men's minds and hearts and spirits from the bondage of evil and the soul-slavery of the Devil, which bring misery upon us. Ours is a war between good and evil, God and the Devil, goodness and wickedness, love and hate, life and death, joy and misery. Ours is a war of the universe between the good spirits of Heaven and the evil spirits of Hell, which are contending for our souls as well as our bodies, not only on this earth but also in the world of the spirit.

Therefore we must not only defend our human rights, but we must also fight the much *greater* warfare of the spirit with the far more powerful weapons of faith, love and compassion, as well as words and deeds of kindness. We must free people from fear

with faith; we must free them from hatred with love; we must free them from sorrow with joy; we must free them from war with peace; we must free them from poverty with plenty; and we must free them from death with eternal heavenly happiness!

The pen *is* mightier than the sword. Ours is a war of *words* and *ideas* to thrill people's minds with faith and hope! We wish to fill their hearts with love and peace and joy to set their spirits free, as well as perform deeds of love and kindness to free their bodies from pain. We must therefore wage a war of words against the ideas of evil, a war of faith against fear, a war of hope against doubt.

We must inspire people to believe in God and His love and His plan for the glorious future of mankind in the soon-to-come Kingdom of God on earth, run by the righteous, in which there shall soon be no more sorrow nor crying nor pain nor death, but all shall be light and health and happiness and peace and plenty for everyone.¹

We must teach people the loving, life-giving Words of God, the Bible, that they might have His life and love and happiness forever! Mighty empires of the sword have come and gone, but His words of love and life endure and continue to give joy and peace and love and life and hope to billions for generations. Alexander, Caesar, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and

¹ Revelation 21:1-4

others like them have come and gone, but the words and ideas of the prophets of God live on forever.

The Word of God knows no boundaries, no nation, no race, no empire. Neither is it bound by time or space, nor limited by people or war or force of arms. It embraces all mankind and unites their minds and hearts and spirits in faith and love of God and each other for the good of all!

The philosophers, teachers, prophets and men of God have seldom ruled empires, but they have won worlds of people with their words, faith and ideas which captured hearts, minds and spirits and set them *forever* free. The followers of God are numbered in the billions for millenniums, and God's eternal Kingdom of Love has conquered the realms of people's eternal spirits, far greater and longer lasting than mere worldly empires of the sword!

We cannot force people to be good. We cannot legislate righteousness. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." We must persuade their minds, win their hearts, inspire their spirits and save their souls so that they will *willingly* do good and not evil! To truly win the love of a woman, she must be wooed, not forced.

We cannot change the world without changing people's minds, and we cannot change their minds unless we change their hearts, and we cannot change their hearts without the inspiration of God's Spirit to save them, body and soul.

We must work to save the *entire* person, not merely their body and their environment. No one will ever be happy with a heavy heart, a troubled mind, a discouraged spirit and an unsaved soul. We must work to save the whole person, not just part of them. We must work to save the whole world, not just part of it. We must work to save people for *eternity*, not just for this present time! Only the power and life and light and love and Words of God can do this!

We must use every means available to get His Words to all men throughout the earth. We must convey His ideas, hopes, faith, love and plans for His creations to the eyes and minds and thoughts of all people everywhere, that all hearts may be changed and all spirits inspired and all souls saved—as well as bodies—to live and love together forever!

We must have a vision for the universal salvation of mankind, not just our own nation. We must not confine ourselves solely to the petty matters of the moment and cares of this life, or the concerns of only one people or one nation or one race or one culture or one religion or one political view or one economic system.

The salvation of man must be for all if it is for any, and must include everyone if all are to be happy. Though ninety-nine sheep were in the fold, the shepherd was not content until the last lost one was found and rescued. Their number was not complete and the shepherd could not rest as long as there was still one unhappy, one still astray!¹

We must search for and find *all* of God's lost sheep, and give them His loving Words of life and faith. We must bring them all into His fold, that they may be of one fold with one Shepherd forever.

We must tell everyone, even though not all will listen or respond or be saved. We owe the message of God and His life of love to everybody, but especially to those who will believe and receive it. God only fills the hungry souls, but those who think they are already full and do not need Him or to change, He sends empty away!² So waste no time arguing with those who do not want to see; there are none so blind as those who refuse to look. Feed the hungry, give sight to those who long for light, and love the unloved now.

If God be for us, no man can stand against us, however great their power or numbers. Have faith in God! "If God is for us, who can be against us?"³ If you do good, who is he that will stop you? None can withstand the power of God or His forces of Heaven, if He be on your side and you on His, doing that which is right!⁴

We are in a fight to the finish, and the victory is ours, praise God! We may lose a few battles, but we're winning the war, and the world will soon be ours for God and His Kingdom. Never give up! Be not discouraged, but be of good faith and of good cheer, for God

¹ See Matthew 18:12-14; ² See Luke 1:53 ⁴ See Acts 5:38-39
Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-16 ³ Romans 8:31

is with us and we cannot fail. We are bound to win, for God is with us, and we fight a holy, right and just war of faith and love for God and others. “Love *never* fails,” for “God is love.”¹

Jesus said that Heaven and Earth will pass away, but God’s Words shall never pass away.² So *use* them and spread them and His love in word and deed through every means at your command, to give people light and hope and life and love and peace and plenty and contentment and heavenly happiness forever!

You are no fool to give a life you cannot keep for a love you will never lose!

¹ I Corinthians 13:8; I John 4:8

² See Matthew 24:35

Mountain Men

When Jesus climbed the mountain, He left the multitude behind. “And seeing the multitudes, He [Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.”¹

Mountain peaks are never crowded. Why? Because it's hard work getting there. Not very many people desire to climb mountains. It's lonesome, and you have to leave everything behind to do it. You're likely to get lots of scratches and bumps, and it might even cost you your life.

But there is more light on the mountain. Long after the valley is in darkness, you can still see the sun. The valley is almost always dark—full of people and things, but usually in darkness. The mountain is windy and cold, but thrilling.

If you're going to climb a mountain, you have to have the feeling that it's worth dying for! If you're going to climb any mountain—the mountain of this

¹ Matthew 5: 1

life, the mountain of accomplishment, the mountain of obstacles, of difficulty—it has to be worth braving wind and cold and storm, symbolic of adversities.

Alone on the mountaintop, you feel so close to the Lord. The voice of His Spirit there is so loud it's almost like it's thundering! But the voice of the multitude is so loud in the valley that you can't hear the voice of God. The silence on the mountain peak is deafening. You get a real "high" on top of a mountain. It's a thrill!

Of course, mountain climbing *is* extremely dangerous. You're never so near the abyss as when you're on the brink. One little misstep will send you right down to the bottom again. It's a strange thing about mountain climbing: It's often much easier to climb up than back down. Once you're up, you may never get back. That's one of the prices you pay for climbing mountains. Most mountain climbers who die are lost in the descent, because when they are climbing up they can see where they're going, but when descending they often can't see ahead.

Once you have climbed a mountain and reached the peak, you may not want to leave. There's no inspiration in going back down. Whereas there is a certain drive, almost a spiritual inspiration going up, and you'll risk anything to reach the top. But going down?—There's little motivation, no goal, and no accomplishment. You're just sliding back down into the slough—back into the morass of humanity and the mire of the multitude.

Only *pioneers* climb mountains—people who want to do something that few have ever done before, who want to get above the multitude and go beyond what has already been accomplished. Pioneers must have vision—vision to see what no one else can see; faith—faith to believe things no one else believes; initiative—initiative to be the first one to try it; courage—the guts to see it through!

On the mountain you are the first to see the sun rise and the last to see it set. You see the full circle of God's glorious creation—the 360-degree circumference of the horizon, the entire scope. It's like seeing all of life from its beginning to its end and understanding.

You feel like you're living in eternity, whereas down below they're living in time. You see the world in its proper perspective, with range after range to be conquered, and a world beyond the vision and horizon of normal men. You see distant peaks yet to be climbed, distant valleys yet to be crossed. You see things that the men in the valleys can never see, or even comprehend.

In the valley, people get so caught up in the multitude and the little make-believe world of materialism that they can't see anything but time and creatures of time and things of time, which are soon to pass away. But if you thrust your head above the multitude, you become like a mountain in their midst, and they will resent and resist and fight you because they can't understand you and don't want you.

They don't even want to know that there *are* mountains, and they don't want others to hear there are mountains, nor to have a breath of fresh air from those crystal peaks. They want to keep everyone shut in down in the valley, in the mud and mire. When you appear to be on a mountain while they are in the valley, they hate you, because it's obvious you are above them, and they don't want anyone to be above them. They want to keep you stuck in the mud like the rest of them. They don't want it to be known that there is any other place to go than the valley, and they will do everything they can to discourage you from climbing the mountain.

Do you realize that since time immemorial, wars have been fought between the people who lived in the valleys and the people who lived on the mountains? That's history. The mountain people were always hardier and fewer, but they survived, because they always had their mountains to flee to. The valley people would rarely follow, as they weren't tough and husky enough to climb, so they would chase the mountain people up a little way and let them go. They just wanted to get rid of them. The valley people didn't want to conquer the mountains; they just wanted to get rid of the mountain people, who were thorns in their flesh and pricks in their side. The mountain people *proved* someone could live somewhere other than in the valley, something *they* said was impossible. History is full of examples of moun-

tain people conquering valley people, but seldom of the valley people conquering the mountain people.

However, the danger has always been that when the mountain people had conquered the valley people, they themselves settled down in the valley. The greatest danger is when the mountain people make peace with the valley, when it becomes safe for them to go down into the valley. The greatest danger is *safety* and *security*, because then you lose that *freedom* and *liberty* of the mountain, the wild freedom of the mountain!

The valley land is man's country; the highlands are God's country. Man dominates the valley, but only God dominates the mountain, and the men living on the mountains know this. But men living in the valleys think they are God, because they dominate themselves. They have become so secure that they think they don't need God. They have forgotten there is any God, for they can't see the sky any longer. But those on the mountains experience things that are so frightening and dangerous that they *have* to live close to God.

If you climb a mountain, it's usually a rough and a rugged road, and often means carrying a hard and a heavy load. And though the people you meet on the mountain aren't always kind, they're even *worse* down in the valley. There aren't many places to live on the mountain—just little rugged shelters and lean-tos. There's not much to eat. It's cold and windy, but it's a thrill even to die there. It's better to die on the moun-

tain than to live in the valley! Whoever read in the newspaper about the man who slipped and fell on the city street? But the man who dies on the mountain, even in a faraway country, makes the news because at least he dared to *try!*

Joshua and Caleb, two of the Old Testament Hebrews who scouted out the Promised Land, were real pioneers and mountain men. When the other scouts expressed fear of the dangers and hardships before them, Caleb as good as said, “Let the unbelievers take the valleys. *I’ll take the mountain!*”¹ He was a fighter and a pioneer. He and Joshua were the only two of the older generation who survived the forty years in the wilderness with Moses and were allowed by God to enter and enjoy the Promised Land.

Beaten paths are for beaten men, but mountain peaks are for the mighty pioneers.

If you take the mountain, you’ll leave the multitudes behind. We read that when Jesus climbed the mount, only His disciples came to Him. They were the only ones who had the priceless privilege of hearing the world’s most famous sermon firsthand. The only ones who really heard from Heaven that day were the ones who left the multitudes and took to the mountain—the disciples, the ones who followed Jesus all the way.

I wonder how many tried to go along with them for a while and got left by the wayside huffing and puffing. I’m quite sure it weeded out all the people who were

¹ Numbers 13:30

just looking for Him to give them more loaves and fishes¹, and “What’s in it for me?” because the *price* was too great! “What’s the use of climbing this big mountain with those crazy people! They’re fanatics anyway or they wouldn’t be climbing this mountain! They’re fools! Don’t they know it’s never been climbed before? Don’t they know you can’t do it? Why should we go up there and risk our necks even if we do see a miracle or get another fish sandwich? No use wearying ourselves with this mountain. Let’s just sit down here and see if they ever make it back down again. We’ll sit here and enjoy a nice rest while they climb the mountain. Wait and see if it can be done first.”

Well, you rarely ever hear about the people who wait to see if it can be done. You only hear about the people who either made it or died trying. But when you make it, the mouth of God will be opened unto you! He’ll speak to you face to face and He Himself will teach and reveal to you the greatest of His secrets!

What do you hear on the mountain? Things that are going to echo around the world. What do you hear in the stillness? Whispers that are going to change the course of history! The greatest laws ever given to man, whereby most of the world is still ruled, were given to one man alone on a mountain. Moses came down from a mountain with the Ten Commandments, and the Hebrew nation was never the same, nor was the world!

¹ Matthew 14:14-21

The greatest sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, was given to a handful of mountain men by the greatest mountaineer of all, Jesus, who finally climbed His last mountain—Mount Calvary, Golgotha—and died alone for the sins of the world. That was a mountain that only *He* could climb for you and me, but He *made* it!

After Jesus' disciples heard His Sermon on the Mount, they came down and changed the world. They were never the same. What changed them that changed the world? They heard the voice of God teaching them things that were completely contrary to what was being said in the valley! In the valley they were saying, "Blessed are the Romans—the proud and the powerful. Look what they've done! They've conquered the whole world! It pays to be a Roman!"

But on the mount, Jesus was saying just the opposite:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit [the humble], for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."*¹ Simple, illiterate fishermen were listening to a carpenter tell them something that would make them greater rulers than the Caesars of Rome! "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—His poor ignorant and unlearned disciples—"for theirs is the Kingdom" that is going to rule the universe!

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*² More blessed to have problems and sorrows? Yes, because you will be comforted. In the

¹ Matthew 5:3² Matthew 5:4

valley they are saying, “More blessed to rejoice and be happy and have a parade! *This* is our rejoicing. How dare you come among us with warning, telling us to change!” But you, the mountain people, will be comforted and they will be judged.

“*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*”¹ Those who are meek, who don’t fight back violently and are willing to suffer for the Gospel, are going to win the greatest battle of all—that for the whole world! Those who have to go to jail for their faith, take it on the chin and be persecuted are the *rulers* of the next world, the world to come.² The poor in spirit are a mountain people. They that mourn dwell on the mountain. The meek are from the mountain.

“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*”³ The people on the mountain hunger and thirst for the truth, and only God can satisfy them. The people down in the valley can’t see any further than the end of their nose and are satisfied with themselves and are full—and He sends them away empty.⁴

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*”⁵ The merciful are from the mountain. You rarely hear of Saint Bernard dogs in the valley. These famous rescue dogs are mountain dogs; they save and have mercy on the mountain people, and they obtain mercy and glory and even fame!

¹ Matthew 5:5

³ Matthew 5:6

⁵ Matthew 5:7

² 2 Timothy 2:12

⁴ Luke 1:53

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*¹ Melted snow from unspoiled mountaintops is pure, fresh water. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”² King David wasn’t always pure, but because he loved the Lord, knew he was a sinner, and relied on God’s forgiveness, he obtained mercy. Despite David’s sins and mistakes, God called him “a man after My own heart.”³ He was pure in *heart*. There’s no smog on the mountain. The air is pure. The water is pure. The people are pure in heart. They see God.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”*⁴ Peacemakers with whom? Make peace with the enemy, with the valley? How can you be at peace with them? How can you be at peace with the valley when the valley *refuses* to be at peace with you? You come to preach peace, but what happens? They are for *war!* You cannot make peace with those who want war!⁵

Who then can you make peace with?—Peace with God and peace with the peacemakers, those who *want* peace. At the birth of Jesus, the angels sang, “Peace on earth toward men of good will⁶”—not “good will toward men,” but as some other translations of the Bible say: “toward men of *good will*.” How can you have peace with men of evil will? With them it is impossible! There is seldom peace between the

¹ Matthew 5:8³ Acts 13:22⁵ Psalm 120:7² Isaiah 1:18⁴ Matthew 5:9⁶ Luke 2:14

mountain people and the valley people because they don't even begin to understand each other. The only thing the mountain people can do is conquer the valley people, and the easiest way to do that is to let those who won't listen rot in their own iniquity, so they become weak and lazy, corpulent and sick with their own sin. Then they're no match for the mountain people! This is history for thousands of years. Mountain people conquer the valley people.

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. ...”*¹ They come down from the mountain and offer the peace of the mountain to those in the valley, and they are mobbed and jailed and crucified! But they are blessed. It is more blessed to be mobbed and jailed and crucified when you know you're from the mountain and you have the *truth* and you know you're *right*, than it is to live a lie in the valley in leisure and security.

You are persecuted because you are right and they cannot stand the right. The valley people have been in darkness so long that the light blinds them. They cannot stand to find out you are right and they have been wrong. They don't want to be *exposed!*

*“For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*² We end where we started. The poor in spirit *are* the persecuted, and either way, they wind up with the Kingdom of Heaven!

*“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”*³

¹ Matthew 5:10a

² Matthew 5:10b

³ Matthew 5:11

The valley people say, “You are disturbing our false sense of security, disturbing our peace.” What you were really trying to do is *give* them peace. You’re disturbing their confusion. To them, confusion is peace. That’s the kind of peace they understand. They hate for you to come along with real peace, because it reveals that they don’t have real peace. So they’ll lie and deceive and say all manner of evil against you falsely.

But “*rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven*”¹—not here always, unless you live in the continual Heaven of the Lord’s peace and joy. Then you can get a lot of that reward right now. You can already be in Heaven in spirit. Jesus said, “the Kingdom of Heaven is within you,”² so great is that reward of Heaven in your heart, and great is your reward in the Heaven hereafter.

“*For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*”³—those other prophets *like* you, other prophets like *yourselves*. Jesus was telling His followers that they, too, were prophets. You have attained the ranks of prophets when you receive persecution for your prophesying, and “great is your reward in Heaven!”

“*You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.*”⁴ Some members of the established churches think they are the salt of the earth. There was a time in

¹ Matthew 5:12a

³ Matthew 5:12b

² Luke 17:21

⁴ Matthew 5:13

the days of the Early Church in the Book of Acts when Christians were hunted, persecuted and crucified—but they *were* the salt of the earth! But now most of those mountain men have come down to live in the valley and they have *lost* their savor.

So what is going to be *your* vow?—Like Caleb and Joshua, “I’ll take the mountain!” Or would you rather live in the lush luxury of the valley with the spiritually dead valley people who got that far and didn’t want to go any further?

Which nations have stayed free longer throughout history than most nations in the world?—Those like Switzerland in the top of the Alps, Afghanistan in the Hindu Kush mountain range, and Nepal in the top of the Himalayas. Other civilizations have come and gone, but they are still here! They may not be very numerous or powerful or very famous, but they are still here!

In the Scriptures, mountains, not valleys, symbolize power and greatness. The Lord speaks of the Kingdom of God as a mountain that becomes so great it fills the whole earth!¹ It speaks of the Lord’s house as a mountain, where the whole earth shall come and worship and from where the Word of the Lord shall go forth.²

¹ Daniel 2:35,44

² Isaiah 2:2

*“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.”*¹ Where have you pictured those pastures? I’ve always envisioned them as mountain meadows with beautiful crystal mountain pools. *“He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”*² What is His path like?—A narrow and rugged *mountain path!* *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . . .”*³ There’s death in the valley! Life is on the mountain! Get out of the valley! *“Flee as a bird to your mountain.”*⁴

¹ Psalm 23:1–2 NIV

² Psalm 23:3 NIV

³ Psalm 23:4 NIV

⁴ Psalm 11:1

Did God Make a Mistake?

Did God make a mistake by putting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where they wound up making their own choices—the wrong ones?¹

Did God have to confess failure by the Flood, in that He had to wipe out all mankind for its wickedness?²

Was the Tower of Babel a total disaster, and was the confusion of tongues a catastrophe? Or was it necessary to accomplish God's purpose to humble and scatter man over the face of the earth?³

Was it a mistake when Moses, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, killed a cruel Egyptian taskmaster and had to flee for his life, and ended up living for forty years in the wilderness, tending sheep as a humble shepherd?⁴ Wasn't that a terrible setback to the cause and the deliverance of his people? Or was it necessary for Moses to go into exile to learn the

¹ Genesis 3:6

² Genesis 6:5–7

³ Genesis 11:1–9

⁴ Exodus chapter 2

lessons God had to teach him to make him the man he needed to be to deliver his people?—Totally dependent on God, not himself.

Did God make a mistake when He chose Saul to be king of Israel, considering the way Saul turned out? Was Saul a failure? Or did he accomplish God's purpose in training the king God was really after, David?¹ God gets some of His greatest victories out of seeming defeat, and He even causes the wrath of man to praise Him!²

Did God make a mistake when He let David fall for Bathsheba, and fall from grace in the eyes of the kingdom, fall from the throne at the hand of his rebellious son, Absalom, and depart in disgrace to another country with only a handful of his friends?³ Did David really fall *downward* or was this a fall *upward*? Sometimes God's way up is *down*—usually, in fact!—Just the *opposite* of what we think! God loves to do things contrary to natural expectation, because that takes a miracle and shows that it's God and not man. As a result, David was humbled and the whole kingdom was humbled, and they were reminded that it was only the Lord who had made them what they were.

From that squeezing and twisting of David's life came forth the sweetness of the Psalms and the fragrance of his praises to the Lord for His mercy. It was all God and all grace, and none of himself or his own righteousness—a lesson that's been an encour-

¹ 1 Samuel 9–22

² Psalm 76:10

³ 2 Samuel chapter 15

agement to other great sinners like you and me ever since.

Was the prophet Elijah's ministry defeated when he ran from the wicked Queen Jezebel, after his great victory over 450 false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel? Was his bravery there completely scuttled by his cowardice in the wilderness? After slaying these false prophets, here he was running from a woman. What a picture!¹ The mighty prophet who had towered above all the rest in the power of God on Mount Carmel and had called down fire from Heaven was now running ignominiously from this evil queen! Didn't this defeat his whole ministry? Didn't this undermine his entire witness? Didn't this prove he wasn't such a great prophet after all? Didn't this cause him to lose his following? Or was God trying to show him something that was going to make him a *better* prophet, a *humbler* prophet, who would come back unafraid, even of the king, much less the queen?

Wasn't it a disgrace and a terrible blow to the Lord's cause for the great prophet of doom, Jeremiah, to be hung in stocks before the temple door, so his brethren could spit in his face? Or be dropped in the mud to his armpits by his enemies, so that his dear friend Ebed had to come secretly and pull him out? And wasn't that finally the most scandalous disgrace of all, that he should land in jail, branded as a criminal who had betrayed his own nation and people?

¹ 1 Kings chapters 18–19

Yes, but not to God! It was all a part of God's plan to keep Jeremiah humble and close to the Lord, utterly dependent on God, not on his family or his friends or the king, so God could put him in the safety of the cold storage of prison until he could be delivered and blessed and protected and provided for and encouraged by the ones you would have least expected it from—the cruel, heathen enemies and conquerors of his people.¹

Why didn't God take Gideon's thirty-two thousand men and let them destroy the army of Midian so they could pat themselves on the back and boast what a great people they were? Instead, He instructed Gideon to send most of his army home until only a ridiculously little band of three hundred remained. Then Gideon had his soldiers break clay pots in the middle of the night, brandish fireworks, toot trumpets, and yell their heads off, to the point that they scared their enemies so silly they slew themselves!²

What a humiliating way to win a battle! What an inglorious way to conquer the enemy! It was stupid, idiotic, and ridiculous—but God did it! Gideon and his band could only thank God for the victory, because all they did was something laughable, like breaking pots, waving torches, and shouting, while God did the dirty work. Who could possibly get the credit for that kind of battle but the *Lord*? Certainly not a simple man like Gideon, who was crazy enough to believe God and do what He said. But he was

¹ Jeremiah chapters 38–41

² Judges 7:1–22

willing to obey God, no matter how silly it appeared, as long as he got the job done.

The minute you try to figure the Lord's plans out in your own natural reasoning, you might as well quit, because it will probably never work out that way anyhow—lest you say, “My *own* hand has saved me!”¹

And what shall I say more? For the time would fail me to tell of Barak, and of a nut like Samson! What a wild example *he* was—long hair, always running after the women, getting in fights and drinking with the boys, cracking jokes and betting! Here was a guy who knocked off a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, yet he acted like an ass himself sometimes!² What a reckless, crazy way for God to save His people, by using an unconventional rebel like that! Did God make a mistake? Or was He trying to show that He can use *anything*—even someone like you and me—by giving us such encouraging examples of His successful failures, His fabulous flops, who dared to trust Him in spite of themselves and gave Him all the glory because they knew it had to be God!

Wouldn't it have been much more respectable and acceptable for the King of kings, Jesus, to have been born in a palace, with illustrious members of the court in attendance, and with all the honor and praise of society? Instead, He was born on the dirty floor of a barn, next to cows and asses, wrapped in rags and lying in a feed trough, with a

¹ Judges 7:2

² Judges chapters 14–16

motley crew of poor little shepherd boys kneeling on the floor beside Him.

Wouldn't it have been better for His earthly father, Joseph, to be a prominent potentate instead of a humble hewer of wood? Wouldn't that have made it easier on Jesus and His followers, and wouldn't it have advanced His work a little more rapidly if He had had the approval of the established order? And wasn't that rather humiliating for His humble parents to become fugitives from injustice and have to flee the country like common criminals for having given birth to the leader of a rival revolutionary government—the Kingdom of God?¹

And wouldn't it have been better for Jesus to have lived a little more decently and acceptably, instead of scrounging His food in other men's fields, sleeping in other people's houses—including in the house of a couple of lovely young single sisters, Mary and Martha—and being buried in another man's grave?²

Did He have to always be challenging the religious establishment, defying convention, destroying traditions, and threatening the status quo, so that He had to be executed with two common criminals and leave behind the evil reputation of having been a companion of tax collectors and drunks and harlots, a glutton and a winebibber, a lawbreaker, a disturber of the peace, a demon-possessed fanatic and false prophet of the

¹ Matthew 1–2

² Luke 10:38–42; John 19:38–42

wrong way? That's what they called Him!¹ Couldn't God have used less controversial tactics than that, and accomplished His goals in a more peaceable, respectable, and acceptable manner?

And why deliberately offend the established order? Why deliberately pick a bunch of lowly fishermen and a hated tax collector for His disciples? Couldn't the King of kings have made easier progress and gotten His new movement off to a better start if He had done it *man's* way and chosen His disciples from the learned Sanhedrin², with the approval of the synagogues and the permission of the high priests and a license from Rome? Didn't God make a mistake?

Jesus, certainly You could have had better living conditions! The idea of You camping out on the grass under the trees! You knew that was bound to raise eyebrows and questions about Your character and morality and that of Your disciples, who were a rather questionable group of characters to begin with! Surely You must have been mistaken, Lord, about some of these things, and could have done some of them some better way!

One can understand Your making a *few* mistakes, but going so consistently and stubbornly contrary to all acceptable reason and logic and custom, wasn't that a little foolish, Lord?

¹ Luke 7:34; 23:2; John 10:20

² The Sanhedrin was the supreme judicial and ecclesiastical council of the ancient Jewish nation.

If You had beaten up the moneychangers in the temple *once*, the authorities might have overlooked it, but to drive them out with a whip, bust the furniture, and spill all the money *repeatedly*, You know that was too much! Somebody was bound to get mad and get You in the end!¹

Don't You think You could have improved Your tactics, Lord? Did You have to make it so rough on Your followers from the beginning, so that they suffered undue and unnecessary hardship and persecution due to Your own foolhardy methods and lack of wisdom, Jesus? There must have been a better way!

You've made it very hard to explain You to respectable society—why You had to be so unconventional and controversial, such an iconoclast! Couldn't You have compromised just a little bit on *some* of these issues and not continued to deliberately run head-on into the religious authorities with Your revolutionary doctrines? Couldn't You have polished up Your manner and Your message a *little* bit so it wouldn't have been quite so hard to swallow—such as when You told Your disciples to eat Your flesh and drink Your blood? Why, they could have thought You were starting to teach cannibalism!² Really, You do make it all rather difficult!

Surely some of this was a mistake! We might have understood Your stupid, uneducated followers making some blunders like this—but *You*, their

¹ John 2:13–16; Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15

² John 6:48–63

leader? How could *You* have been guilty of such disgraceful conduct? What did *You expect* people to think? Of course they would accuse *You* of being a drunk and a glutton, a libertine, and a revolutionary! *You* really didn't make it very easy for them to accept *You*, because much of *Your* method and message was terribly hard to swallow for anyone who was accustomed to even the least bit of respectability! Weren't *You* at all concerned about the opinions of men? Didn't *You* care what people thought about *You* and *Your* followers? Didn't the stories that were going around about *You* and the men and women who were following *You* make any difference to *You*?

And then *You* had to pick that fanatic Paul to be one of *Your* leading apostles. *You* might have known that the Jewish religious leaders wouldn't have liked *Your* stealing one of their top rabbis and turning him into a radical Christian. *You* might have known that even *Your* disciples would have doubted the sincerity of such a man, and found it hard to believe that *You'd* do such a thing, to take their worst persecutor and expect them to believe he was now their trusted friend and fellow apostle, after all the damage he'd done them!¹

Lord, how could *You do* this to us? Why did *You* have to make it so hard for us to explain *You* to society? When *Your* actions are almost inexcusable, what do *You* expect society to believe? They can

¹ Acts chapter 9

only go by what they see and hear, and that's bad enough!

Lord, please let us improve on Your methods, and polish up Your message a little, and eradicate some of these controversial aspects of Your ministry! We don't want to make the same kind of mistakes You did! Please help us to be more acceptable in the eyes of the world! Couldn't we classify this amongst the "greater works" that You said believers would do in Your name?¹—That we, unlike You, manage to be accepted by society, even recognized and blessed by it, even working together with it? And in this case, wouldn't You permit us to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers"?²

Couldn't You just, in our case, make it a little more equal, so we wouldn't have to suffer the kind of persecution You and Your early followers did? Shouldn't we have learned something from Your bad example, of what not to do next time? Surely we could learn something from these mistakes of Yours! Otherwise, if Your disciples are going to follow such a nonconformist example as Yours, they're going to have nothing but trouble from beginning to end. You know the world isn't going to stand for it, and Christianity is going to be obliterated!

And Lord, You also should have had much more respect for the temple and synagogues. You know buildings are the foundation of every religion, and without them, where would our religion be? Why, we

¹ John 14:12

² 2 Corinthians 6:14.

couldn't have any ceremonies, and what would we say we belong to if we did not have a denomination? We'd be out in the cold, with nothing to do but tell others about You, and we'd have no support or backing but Yours. Now, that's not very businesslike, and we'd certainly not last long at that rate! Look what happened to Your followers throughout history who insisted on defying the established religious order and evangelizing with no visible means of support, no homes, and no governmental recognition. Almost without exception, from Your earliest prophets to Your latest martyrs, they were ridiculed, disbelieved, jailed, fined, beaten, and even killed.

But what could You expect, Lord? You might have known that people wouldn't stand for that sort of thing. Society couldn't have people like that running around loose without some kind of regulation and control. It might undermine their whole setup and destroy the people's confidence in their religion, their temples and their religious leaders. You know we just can't have that, Lord! Everything has to be done in decency and order. We just couldn't have religious fanatics running around loose, proclaiming "Jesus loves you!" Society is bound to call it "disorderly conduct," because it's not according to their order or the usual order of the day.

Haven't You made a mistake, Lord? Isn't there some better way You could do things, with a better class of people, more acceptable methods, and a less offensive message that wouldn't upset people so

much and make them so angry at You? Most of us want to be of some reputation and to be well thought of and respected by our communities! Most of us don't care to be a news headline, especially not in this distasteful fashion. Most of us don't care to be considered religious fanatics. Don't You think You and Your first followers set us a rather poor example, which got them off to a rather bad start with the community? True, the apostles *did* seem to reach a lot of people with the Gospel, but *what* a Gospel!

And what's the matter with a little formal higher education? Don't You think You and Your disciples would have been much more readily recognized by the respectable citizenry if You had been a little more learned and versed in the ways of the world and what it expects of its religious leaders?¹

And to actually say that the Jewish temple was going to be destroyed! Wasn't this sacrilege and blasphemy, proclaiming that what they called the very house of God was doomed to destruction?² If *we* said things like that, who would You expect to follow us then, Lord?—No one but the riffraff of society like *You* had, or Jeremiah had, or St. Francis of Assisi had, or some of those other nonconformists of Yours! This would get us *nowhere* with society and the general public, just as it got *them* nowhere but jail and judgment and in some cases, execution! I'm sure we must have learned *something* from all of this.—And we don't care to repeat *Your* mistakes! In this modern

¹ Acts 4:13

² Matthew 24:1–2

day, we must use new, improved, and more civilized methods, more consistent with the scientific age of educated people in an affluent society!

Lord, do we have to be so completely denounced by the world in order to keep us separate and uncompromising, to keep us from drifting back into it? Do they have to reject us entirely to drive us to You? Must we utterly burn our bridges behind us, so that it's impossible for us to go back? Isn't this asking a little too much, to make us such offscourings of society as St. Paul was, and as he said the apostles were¹—such dregs of humanity as Your early followers were, such misfits, odd characters, fanatics and peculiar people?²

If we go this far, we'll never be able to go back! Society will never accept us again. It might bring division and betrayal by those who are not loyal, like Judas did to You. It might offend so many weaker brethren, we'd have very few left, and we would be able to persuade very few to follow such extremes of loyalty, dedication, and doctrine, like what happened to You after that “flesh and blood sermon”!

Yes, Gideon did lose most of his army through such extremism, but that was a long time ago, Lord, and things are different now. You're not supposed to make the tests so hard *today* that You lose most of Your army. Where would the established church be if she did that today? There wouldn't be much left! Even Your own disciples forsook You over some of Your “hard sayings!”³ It's just too much, You'll never get a

¹ I Corinthians 4:13

² I Peter 2:9 KJV

³ John 6:60

very big army that way! We'll never be very popular, practicing such extremes as this! We'll never be generally accepted if we preach and practice *everything* in the Bible! You surely wouldn't expect *that* of us! It's just too much! It must be a mistake! *Please* don't ask that of *us*! Do we *have* to be so different? Aren't You making a *mistake*, Lord? Isn't there some better, more proper way?

Forget the "proper way!" The proper way is usually of man! The unexpected and the improper, the unconventional and untraditional, the unorthodox and unceremonious, contrary to man's natural expectation—*this* is the way God usually works. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."¹ Who can know the mind of the Lord, and who can show *Him* anything?²

Who do we think *we* are, anyway, to tell God what to do and how to do it? God knows what He's doing, and it's none of our business how He does it! So we ought to stop trying to tell God how He ought to do things. "Now, Lord, You must do it this way or that way so we'll be accepted and people will understand." Forget about the people who don't want to understand! Just trust God that He knows what He's doing! "Trust in the Lord with all your heart: and lean not on

¹ Isaiah 55:8–9

² Isaiah 40:13–14

your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”¹

God loves to do things contrary to the way we think He ought to do them. Is this a mistake? Is God wrong?

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and no one comes to the Father, except through Me.”² “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are *few* who find it.”³ “Many are called, but few are chosen.”⁴ “Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the *foolish* things of the world to put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the *weak* things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.”⁵ “Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ ... From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’”⁶

“Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”⁷ For He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant.”⁸ “He is despised and rejected by men; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was taken from prison and from judgment ... and they made His grave with the

¹ Proverbs 3:5–6

² John 14:6

³ Matthew 7:14

⁴ Matthew 22:14

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:26–27

⁶ John 6:60,66–67

⁷ Hebrews 13:13

⁸ Philippians 2:7

wicked—but with the rich at His death.”¹ “And you will be hated of all nations for My name’s sake.”² “Because you are not of the world, but I chose you *out* of the world, therefore the world *hates* you. ... If they persecuted *Me*, they will also persecute *you*.”³ “He who receives *you* receives *Me*, and he who receives *Me* receives Him who sent *Me*.”⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.”⁵ “Whoever is ashamed of *Me* and *My Words* in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”⁶ “Woe to you when all men speak well of you.”⁷

God *doesn't* make mistakes! Even the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.⁸ There is no better way than God’s way.

Are you willing to enter that narrow gate that leads to life, even if you are considered a fool and of no reputation in the eyes of the world?

¹ Isaiah 53:3,8–9⁴ Matthew 10:40⁷ Luke 6:26² Matthew 24:9⁵ Matthew 10:24⁸ I Corinthians 1:25³ John 15:19–20⁶ Mark 8:38

Dare to Be Different!

A world-famous nonconformist named Jesus, while exhorting His disciples to leave their old lives in order to follow Him, warned them that they would be “as sheep in the midst of wolves.”¹ “If you were of the system,” He as good as said, “the system would love its own. But you are *not* of the system; therefore the system hates you.”²

Dare to be different, He was saying. Venture to vary from the norm which the systematic system addicts have established to conform to their own Establishment behavior, and they will hate you for daring to challenge their authority to tell you what they have decided is right and wrong.

Just you dare to be so bold as to think, act, live or teach differently from the vast robotic, narcotic, conventional, pretentional, conformist, performist, zombie bombie, so-called silent majority of the supposedly average worldlings, and you will soon

¹ Matthew 10:16

² John 15:19, paraphrased

discover that they are not so silent, and you will hear them too, for it is the hit dogs that howl! And if you learn to run with these wolves, you will learn to howl too, especially when someone dares to say and prove that the “normal” way of life is not the only way!

History has proven time and again in every age that the majority is usually wrong. As Jesus said, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it: because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”¹ As the German philosopher Hegel said, one thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history. Therefore the sordid chapters of the horrors of history continue to repeat themselves.

When any courageous iconoclast becomes so presumptuous as to dare to smash the idols of the generally accepted behavior of the vast and wrongful majority, or if some brave pioneer of spiritual matters or of science is so foolhardy as to even suggest that society could possibly be wrong on some things, he is often hooted down as a maniac, denounced as demented, persecuted as a departurist, and sometimes even condemned as a criminal, hanged as a heretic, or crucified as a menace to society!

Why? Because the darkness cannot stand the light, and the wrong cannot bear the right, and the big lie cannot tolerate the truth, and those who are bound

¹ Matthew 7:13,14

bitterly resent the freedom of the free, because by all of these the wrongful majority are exposed for their sins of darkness, deception, greed and the enslavement of the exploited. They must therefore furiously endeavor to smother the light, say that wrong is right, attempt to shout down and drown out the voice of truth, frustrate and bind the free, and exterminate those who would expose and terminate society's hypocrisy.

When Noah built his big boat on dry land and said there was going to be a worldwide flood (when it had never even rained before), he was laughed at by the vast, vocal majority of his day who were later to drown in that very same flood, while Noah and his family had the last laugh.¹

When Abraham, at the age of one hundred, claimed that he was going to become the father of many nations and that his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea, his own barren wife, Sarah, laughed him to scorn. But Abraham was soon to laugh last, because Sarah, herself in her nineties, bore him Isaac, the forefather of the Jews. And Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar, bore him Ishmael, forefather of the Arabs.²

When a lowly shepherd from lonely Sinai claimed he was going to single-handedly deliver six million Hebrew slaves from the greedy clutches of their all-

¹ Genesis chapters 6–8; Hebrews 11:7

² Genesis 17:1–21; 18:1–19; 21:1–5

powerful Egyptian oppressors, Moses' own people made fun of him. But it was he who later had the fun as he led them miraculously through the Red Sea on dry ground.¹

The people of Jericho jeered when Joshua jogged his Jews seven times around their impregnable walls, but it was really a blast on those tiny trumpets when those walls came tumbling down.²

The Midianite army of thousands must have really cracked up laughing when most of Gideon's army departed, and he was only left with three hundred men. But it was the Midianites' turn to flee when Gideon's paltry party pelted them with pottery in the middle of the night.³

The mighty lords of the conquering Philistines sneered when Samson, the proverbial Israelite strongman, stood blind before them as their captive. But when he pushed the pillars of their temple apart, it was his turn to snicker as he slew more of his enemies with his death than his life.⁴

The giant Goliath ridiculed the little lad with the slingshot, but when David cut loose with just one honest bit of rock, the Philistine phony fell flat on his face and the children of God danced for joy.⁵

The prophets who predicted the doom of the dominant dominions of their day were derided as daft and demented, but when each power fell in its

¹ Exodus 3:1–10; 14:8–30

² Joshua 6:4–5, 15–16, 20

³ Judges 6:11–14; 7:1–23

⁴ Judges 16:23–30

⁵ 1 Samuel 17:1–10, 42–51

time according to their rhyme, they were no longer found to be fanatically funny!

When Jesus told His religious foes, the Pharisees, that their proud temple would be pulled down, they denounced Him in derision. But forty years later when the Romans burned it to the ground and pulled it stone from stone to get at the melted gold in the cracks, Jesus' prophecy wasn't so funny anymore.¹

When the early Christians prophesied the fall of the Roman Empire, Nero exiled, beheaded and crucified them, burned them at the stake and fed them to the lions. But Nero died a perverted, raving maniac, and Rome burned and her empire eventually crumbled—and the remains were joyously taken over by the Christians themselves!

The early Christian martyrs were vilified, pilloried, tortured, torn apart and sawn asunder by the pagans who attempted to stamp them out. But soon the heathen themselves were conquered by the truth, love and peace of these berated bands of beautiful people.

Then when Christendom itself became the *next* powerful system, the Church establishment tried to suffocate the findings of men of science and stifle the voices of freedom. But in so doing, the Church rang its own death knell as they extolled their fleeting victories over the new enlightenment and the dawn of the Renaissance of learning!

¹ Luke 19:37–44

Nearly all the prophets and leaders of God throughout the Bible and past ages were thought to be crazy by the rest of the world—dreamers and visionaries who hallucinated, heard “voices,” and were pretty well “flipped out” over religion.

The conventionalist, traditionalist, or conformist never makes news or changes anything. He’s just like all the rest. Who cares about hearing about somebody that’s no different than anybody else and is right on man’s so-called norm? It’s the unconventional, non-traditionalist, nonconformist, radical, fanatical, iconoclast who usually makes the news.

The people that stay put and never go anywhere and conform to what everybody else is doing don’t even raise an eyebrow; they don’t wake you up or cause a stir. They always think and do whatever they’re *supposed* to, what society tells them they should. They wouldn’t be caught dead doing what just isn’t done, what nobody else is doing!

The placid little pipsqueaks, Mr. Milquetoasts, string-for-a-backbone jellyfish, that just float around and drift with the tide, like everybody else, and never change anything, never do anything different, never buck the mainstream, never stand up for the truth or what is right, never get out of line, are never out of step with the vast, spineless majority, are therefore never even heard of. They just drift along with everyone else in the flotsam and jetsam, the froth and the foam, the slime and the ooze of normalcy. They

never make a sound, never make a dent in progress, never change a jot or a tittle, never make a mark, never make any impression, so the world doesn't even know they exist! They sink down with the rest in the morass of anonymity—in the mire of Nowhere—and fade into oblivion, never making history!

But the so-called crazy nuts are the ones who make news! History is full of those who dared to challenge the system, dared to be different, dared to buck the tide, dared to shock their generation, dared to defy the science or challenge the mores of their day, dared to champion an unpopular cause, or did something beyond the call of duty. Those who made history were those who lived outside of the norm, the radical, seemingly heretical, revolutionary, misfits, discoverers, inventors, explorers, and the like.

They are the insane dreamers who envisioned doing things that nobody else had ever done before, who thought and behaved differently than their predecessors. And most were thought to have a few screws loose or to be just a little off their rockers compared to the rest of the people. Be they heroic or fiendish, good or bad, diabolical criminals or angelic saints, all were certainly unusual and none of them indifferent!

They lived in fame and died in flame, but nothing and no one could stop them, because the others didn't know how to handle it; they didn't know where these pioneers were going, because nobody had ever gone there or done that before. The rest just weren't

prepared for it, so it took them quite a while to catch up with them.

Of course, the majority usually managed to smother the flame by overwhelming it with the sheer number of their dead bodies. But they have never been able to put out of the memory of mankind that here were those who stood out from the rest, outstanding for their achievements! They dared to be different and did what everyone told them not to, or what others said couldn't be done, because they thought it *should* be done and they could do it, no matter what anybody said. And they *did* it, and the world heard about them!

Beaten paths are for beaten men! Burning the candle at both ends may look crazy, but it sure gives a better light! You may not last long, you may wear out fast, but you'll generate a lot of heat! And when this life is over and the angels beckon you, the world will remember you. If what you did was *right*, God will never forget it! You'll shine as the stars forever, and you'll hear Him say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your Lord"—you and all the rest who dared to be "fools for Christ's sake."¹

¹ Daniel 12:3; Matthew 25:21; 1 Corinthians 4:10

Don Quixote

—The Crazy Crusader

Don Quixote de la Mancha, the amusing, crazily crusading hero and title character of Miguel de Cervantes' early 17th century literary classic, was a caricatured figure of mingled fun and pathos. This gallivanting knight out of time with his generation was so demented he thought he was still living in the days of ancient chivalry. He rode around gallantly on his old nag, in a patchwork suit of armor, with a pot for a helmet, followed by his fat and fuming faithful "squire," Sancho Panza, riding on a donkey.

Sancho was gravely concerned for his odd master's safety during such ridiculous exploits as challenging windmills (which Don Quixote thought to be giants) to battle, rescuing fair ladies whom he supposed to be in distress, and residing in an old inn he imagined to be a castle. Dear Quixote was

really very noble, goodhearted and well-meaning, though somewhat misguided by his dementia and delusions of grandeur.

The book is now considered a masterpiece and the world's first novel. It has been translated into more languages than any other book in the world except the Bible. Its first English translation was published in 1612, only one year after the world-famed King James Bible. Set in Cervantes' native Spain long after the Crusades were over, *Don Quixote* revives the crusading spirit, the search for meaning and purpose in life, the nature and reality of truth, the relativity of judgment, and values and depth of character. It constantly delves beneath the surface of appearances and experience for a deeper significance and conveys an all-pervading sense of the frailties of humanity.

Don Quixote has even inspired movies, such as *The Man of La Mancha* and *The Adventures of Don Quixote*. While viewing the end of the latter on TV, I was suddenly struck by the reaction of Quixote's followers to his return to sanity on his deathbed. A poor young girl asks him sadly, "But how could you have been insane when you were so beautiful, so good and so poetic?"—To which he wanly replies, "I suppose wise madness is better than foolish sanity!" At that, the first few stanzas of the following poem came to me. The rest came later that same night.

He lived in a world of fantasy
Where all were mad but he.
He lived in a world of madness
Where he alone was free!

He lived in a world of madness
Where only he was sane.
He brought them joy and gladness;
They only brought him pain.

Where happiness is madness,
'Tis wisdom in disguise.
Where sanity is sadness,
'Tis folly to be wise.

Oh, give me a world of madness,
If madness is to be glad!
I'd rather be happy in madness,
Than only be sane and sad.

They tell me my goodness is madness;
I should seek after worldly gain!
But I tell them their saneness is sadness,
And it brings to so many such pain.

It's *their* whole world that's in madness!
'Tis *their* whole world that's insane!
I'd rather have joy in my gladness
Than their sanity, sorrow and pain.

They live in a world full of madness,
It was *he* that was really sane.
For our Don Quixote had gladness
In spite of their sorrow and pain.

This world full of violence and madness,
So violent and mad and insane—
Would you rather his joy, or their sadness?
Would you rather his bliss, or their pain?

They like to be rich and be churchy
And wage their cruel wars without end.
Don't let their pollution besmirch me!
I'd far rather heal and to mend.

Yes, I'd rather be happy in Jesus,
Than sane as the Devil and bad.
If it's madness of spirit that frees us,
I'd rather be mad and be glad!

Their world may be sane but temporal,
While mine is unseen but more real!
They call me insane and immoral
In this madness of gladness I feel.

But I say it is they who are crazy,
And it's I who have reality!
It is they who are mad and amaze me,
For mine's for eternity!

It's they who are living in madness!
It's they who are really insane!
It's I who have Jesus and gladness,
And I'll have it again and again!

Give me trips in the spirit that thrill me,
And a mind that with visions God blows!
Their world of killing just chills me!
I like living where anything goes!

For only in realms of the spirit
Can you enjoy heavenly scenes.
That heavenly sound, can you hear it?
Do you know what such ecstasy means?

P.S.

So wee words of wisdom have come from my pen,
Though you think my madness be full to the brim!
For the foolishness of God is wiser than men!
And this world's wisdom is foolishness to Him!¹

¹ I Corinthians 1:25; 3:19

Flatlanders

Fasten your seat belt! We are about to leave the drab and restrictive domain of the Flatlander and delve into the thrilling realm of the spirit world!

Come now and tune in to the mysterious dimension of eternal realities: the living world of forever rather than the dying world of now, the everlasting realm of eternity rather than the temporary space of time, the fascinating dimension that is largely unseen by us in mortal flesh, rather than this mundane plane which is so temporary.

The Bible tells us to set our affection on things above—Heaven—not on things on the earth, for the things which are seen are only for a time, but the things which are *not* seen are eternal.¹

All God's children of faith since the beginning of time have been looking for an unseen world, a "city which has foundations"—*eternal* foundations—"whose builder and maker is God."² Not having

¹ Colossians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 4:18

² Hebrews 11:10

received all that God had promised them but having *seen* those promises from afar, they remained strangers and pilgrims on the earth because they sought a better, heavenly, country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, and He has prepared just such a place for them, the awesome Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, which will come down from God, out of the heavenlies, to rest on planet Earth!¹

This is the hope of all ages: that now unseen eternal world where we shall dwell with Him forever, the Heavenly City described in the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, and mentioned many other places throughout the Scriptures. That's what we're all looking forward to—not pie in the sky, but literal Heaven on Earth.

But God's invisible Heavenly kingdom is *already* in operation and existence, here and now! It not only surrounds us but is *within* us. As Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you."²

Science tells us that in order to exist, all material objects must have four dimensions: length, breadth and depth, which comprise space, and one more—time. Einstein brought this out clearly in his theory of relativity—that time and space are definitely related. Nothing can occupy material space without time; things must have time to exist.

¹ Hebrews 11:13–16; Revelation 21:2–3

² Luke 17:21

I'm holding in my hand an amazing little postcard, a beautiful underwater scene of God's gorgeous and colorful creation. Now the strange thing is that as I look at this postcard nearly edge-on, I can really only see about two dimensions—length and breadth. I am in the land of the Flatlander who can only understand his own little world of two dimensions, with no depth whatsoever. He can't see anything else. And as I look at this card edge-on, I can't see anything else either. If I were a Flatlander, I would insist that there *was* no other world beyond my two dimensions, just because I couldn't see it.

But as I move in a direction unknown to the Flatlander so that I'm looking down on the postcard from above, I find myself in an amazing world indeed, because this is a 3D (three-dimensional) postcard. Suddenly it seems to have an altogether new dimension—depth. I seem to be able to see *into* the picture and observe some objects in front of others. A reed is growing in front of a lovely red coral, fish are swimming in between, and the pebbled bottom fades away into the distance, even beyond my new 3D vision.

So now we have entered a new world, beyond the scope of the poor Flatlander who can only see two directions—if he could exist at all—and we are looking in a new direction which opens a whole new beautiful world to explore. We have become like a god to the Flatlander, a being entirely beyond his comprehension.

We are now above his lowly plane of only two dimensions, and because he can neither look up nor down, we have passed completely out of his sight. Unless we stoop to his lowly level, he cannot see us at all, much less understand our new dimension. For him to be able to see us, we have to get on the exact same plane as him; the moment we vary the slightest fraction out of his plane we are truly “out of sight”!

Our 3D world is one of almost unlimited space, so much larger and greater than his that he could not possibly begin to understand it or us. Ours is a whole new world, marvelous and magnificent, that the Flatlander does not even know exists, simply because he cannot see it.

Even if it were possible to show it to him, it would be so beyond his two-dimensional understanding that he would probably be like the old country farmer, who, the first time he saw a giraffe, said, “There just ain’t no such thing!”

The fact of the matter is that the dear little Flatlander, in his pride, hates to admit that there’s anything beyond his level. Poor fellow! How limited his vision, how narrow his realm, how restricted his scope of operation! Since he can’t go anywhere else, he just hates to admit that there *is* anywhere else. And he is particularly furious with anyone who claims to have been lifted up into that other world and caught a glimpse of what is beyond his own little domain. But just because he doesn’t believe in a realm that is invisible to him, that doesn’t make it not so!

And so it is even with what the Bible calls the “natural man” who refuses to believe that anything such as a *fifth* dimension, a spirit world, could possibly exist, simply because he’s never seen it or been there. “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.”¹ And so he says, “There just ain’t no such thing”—simply because he never saw it before.

To dismiss the entire spiritual realm like that would be just as absurd as if you were to say, “I don’t believe that New York City or London exist because I’ve never seen them or been there.” How ridiculous can you get?!

The Bible is full of evidence, stories and positive declarations of the existence of this fifth dimension, the spirit world. Some of its immortal characters, having passed on into it through death, even came back to tell us about it. Others were lifted up into the realm of the spirit to get a brief glimpse or vision of it, and many received messages from there. And some of us have even been there! I have, so I *know* it exists.

And you can know too! If you really want to know the truth and are willing to admit that others have something you haven’t got but would like, and if you will humbly confess your limitations and ask God and His children to help you find that whole new world, you too can know the indescribable joys, the beautiful scenes, the delightful sounds, and the

¹ | Corinthians 2:14

ecstatic feelings of that marvelous heavenly realm! It's such a wonderful, happy place; it's "out of this world"! You'll love it! Why not try it? What have you got to lose?

All Things Change, But Jesus Never!

Changes in man's society—in his economics, politics, or religion—nearly always come from the bottom, not the top, because the top (the ruling elite) does not *want* to change; it always wants to be on top. But if they try to seal the pot to preserve the status quo, they cannot, and the pot will explode and destroy itself because of the fire.

There must be this continual change. Otherwise there would be total stagnation and corruption, because that which is at the top is the first to ferment, to sour, to rot, and that which is on the bottom is full of dregs, which if allowed to accumulate would solidify and clog the circulatory process. Then that which is on the top would become scum and froth. So, as in the brewing of a good beverage, it must be constantly stirred to prevent the settling of the dregs or the accumulation of scum. To ensure the equal

distribution of all properties involved, there must be constant change and constant stirring and constant circulation to prevent stagnation.

This is the principle of society—as sure as the laws of physics. God has ordained it that way! It is as sure as the law of gravity: What goes *up* must come *down*! And as sure as the law of circulation of liquids and gases, what is *down* must go *up*! “For every high place shall be made low and the low places shall be made straight, and the mighty shall be abased and the weak shall become great. They which live by the sword shall die by the sword; but the meek shall inherit the earth.”¹

As sure as the night follows the day, the light follows the darkness. As sure as the sun rises, it must also set. As sure as the rain falls, it must also rise again. As sure as “from dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return!”² There must be a continual birth, life, death, resurrection. The cycle must be completed—the perfect circle of eternity—to complete the creation of God, of which He is the Designer, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega³

There must be both “in the beginning” and “the Last Days,” as the Bible terms it. “Do not fret because of evil doers,”⁴ because their great houses shall become desolate and their palaces shall be laid waste. The grandeur that was Greece shall tumble into ruins, and the glory that was Rome shall fade into

¹ Matthew 26:52; 5:5

² Ecclesiastes 12:7

³ Revelation 1:8

⁴ Psalm 37:1

oblivion, that He who is eternal may be made manifest, and the beauty of His creation and the glory of His power and the eternity of His love, that He may be all and in all, that God may be glorified.

God moves. He is a moving God. He is never still. He is always doing, going, saying, effecting change in every sphere of creation. He is never static, except for Himself: “I am the Lord: I change not”¹; and except for His Word: “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in Heaven”²; and except for the future—His promises to His children: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.”³

As for all else, “the mountains shall be made low, that which He has exalted shall be abased, and the low places shall be exalted.”⁴ “He that is of a humble and contrite heart in due time shall be highly exalted,” until “time shall be no more,” and the Kingdom of our Lord is come, where He that ruleth in righteousness shall judge the earth and establish everlasting peace.⁵ “And the Kingdom shall never fall, neither shall it be given unto others. It shall be forever.”⁶ And we shall rule and reign with Him upon Earth, and “He shall rule the nations with a rod of iron”—inflexible, unchangeable, eternal—the society of the Kingdom of God.⁷ “For the things which are

¹ Malachi 3:6 KJV

² Psalm 119:89

³ Hebrews 4:9

⁴ Isaiah 40:4

⁵ 1 Peter 5:6;

Revelation 10:6;

12:10; Psalm 9:7;

Isaiah 9:7

⁶ Daniel 2:44

⁷ Revelation 20:6;

2:27; 12:5; 19:15

seen are temporal”—for a little while—“but the things which are not seen are eternal.”¹

“Whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”² Behold, how the mighty have fallen, and God has exalted him of low degree.³

Are *you* becoming stationary with those seeking to preserve the status quo, to freeze the world into a block of ice? Or are you moving with the white-hot fires of the Spirit of God—burning, melting, moving, molding, flowing, pouring, sharing, changing?

Are you attempting to freeze, to preserve, to solidify into immovable ice that means death? Or are you warm, loving and sharing and wooing and sowing and conceiving with the seed that brings life—new birth, new creatures, and a new world—where “old things are passed away and all things have become new”?⁴

You’d better move now, with the life of God, or you’ll be left behind in the death of this world! Karl Marx was right: *This* world *must* change in the dialectics of its materialism in which nothing is permanent. Of course, Marx was short-sighted in that he did not foresee the unchangeable eternity of the spiritual world, which will never change. “For that which is flesh is flesh, and that which is spirit is spirit,”⁵ and

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:18 KJV

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17

² Ecclesiastes 3:14

⁵ John 3:6

³ 2 Samuel 1:27; Luke 1:52

“flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,”¹ for “God is a Spirit”—eternal, unchangeable in the heavens—“and they which worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him,”² not in this or that place, but in the eternal Spirit of God.

Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same! All things change, but Jesus never, glory to His name.³

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;

The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide...

Change and decay in all around I see;

O Thou who changes not, abide with me!

¹ I Corinthians 15:50

² John 4:21–24

³ Hebrews 13:8

“Are You a Sightseer ... or a Seer-Sighter?”

This revelation came to me as our train wound its way through the hills of Italy. As my wife and I gazed out the window upon the ruins of castles, palaces and majestic villas of bygone eras, we were struck by how these great buildings, these glorious edifices, these grand creations of man, had all fallen into ruin and decay with the passage of time.

While I viewed the historic hillsides with their once proud structures, now in ruins, I could envision the glories of past centuries, the armies that had swept across these hills, first one way, then another—the legions of Rome and the hordes of her enemies—changing, ever changing, the face of history.—One constructing and another destroying, one building and another tearing down, one creating and another demolishing. Nothing was ever permanent. Each new kingdom or empire washed away all but the meager

vestiges of the past, so that there was little left to brag about—sometimes not one stone standing upon another. —Nothing but giant blocks of useless rock cluttering up the landscape and standing in the way of progress, of interest only to the historian and archaeologist.

Mankind's greatest pride is often in his buildings—the works of his hands—and they have usually been his downfall, from the towers of Babel of yesterday to the temples of Mammon [materialism] of today. Man glories in what he has made and prides himself in what he thinks are going to be his everlasting works, to influence with awe and wonder the generations to come.

But their end is always the same—the debris of years, the wreckage of centuries, often cleared away to build a new monument to yet another one of man's futile endeavors and classic failures. They are of little meaning to the present, and eventually always go the way of all flesh, into the grave of oblivion, monstrous reminders of man's transitory tenure, classical testimonials against his puny efforts to eternalize himself without God.

During our missionary travels, people often ask us: "Have you seen this?" "Did you go there?" "Did you see this sight?" "Did you view that creation of man, that building, this tower?" Much to their surprise, our usual reply is "No!"—even con-

cerning the commonest points of interest on most tourists' sightseeing lists. The things that everybody comes to New York or London or Paris or Rome to see, we haven't even bothered to go around the corner to give a passing glance. The dead, temporary buildings of man do not appeal to us, for they are only here today and gone tomorrow—lifeless, burdensome, costly piles of junk!

What interests us is seeing the eternal creations of God, coming face to face with the infinitely more fascinating, everlasting souls of men—that heart-to-heart contact of spirit with spirit, that reaching out for the touch divine in His creation, His handiwork, His most eternal workmanship, the immortal human soul. We glimpse it in every person we meet, everyone with whom we come in contact—the vibrant eternal, immortal, marvel of human spiritual life that comes from the hand of God!

Therefore, to those who ask us if we have seen this or that sight, we have come to enjoy replying with an emphatic “No, we are not even interested! We are only interested in *you!* We're not interested in the dead, but the living!”

This is what is thrilling! *This* is what is exciting! *This* is what motivates us to cross continents and oceans to faraway lands. We go to seek and to save that which was lost, not to tour and to sightsee at the fantastic failures of man! *This* is what is worth seeing: that longing look deep in the eyes of a frightened young girl, that searching spirit of a wandering boy,

that deep hunger in the heart of man for his Creator, the immortal spirit, the spark of eternity in the hearts of the living—not the dead, ridiculous rubble of the things of the past!

So we have come to detest “sights” and “sightseeing” and tours of the wonders of man. We have come to scorn his ridiculous creations that are so lauded by the children of men and so praised by man’s worshippers! In every city, in every land, in every great exhibition, it is usually the handiwork of man that is most praised, as man pats himself on the back for having arrived as a god!

The worship of places, buildings and things is man worship: his religion, his purpose, his life, his death, his “death’s work”—not the work of the life of God. We want to see living creatures, living beings, humans from the hand of God! We want to see people: the children, the men, and the women, human beings! We want to look on the land of the living, not the creations of the dead; we want to see the homes of the spirit, not the tombs of the past. We want to see life, and to live, to touch, to warm, to woo, to win the living—not the dead—with God’s love!

“Let the dead bury the dead!”¹ Let the spiritually dead go to see the sights of the mausoleums of dead men! As for me and my house, we will live in the realm of the living—the Kingdom of the living God,

¹ Luke 9:60

the hearts and the souls and the lives of the immortals, the temples of the living God, you and me and everyone, all of us!

Jesus told His followers, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere”¹ and make disciples of all nations.²—Not sightseers, but seers—prophets—of the wonders of the Kingdom of God! “For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”³ Set not your affections on the things which are upon the earth, but the things which are above in the realm of the spirit and in the hearts of men—the Kingdom of God whose building you are, lively stones, living organisms in a spiritual house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.⁴ Therefore, “seek first the Kingdom of God.”⁵

Are you a sightseer, or a seer of the spirit? Are you a tourist of the tombs, or an evangelist of the living? Are you telling others the Good News about Jesus? He told His followers, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God,”⁶ and “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”⁷ In this whole world there’s not a more thrilling sight to see than a saved soul!

¹ Mark 16:15 TLB

⁵ Matthew 6:33

² Matthew 28:19

⁶ Luke 9:60

³ 2 Corinthians 4:18

⁷ Matthew 4:19

⁴ Colossians 3:2; 1 Peter 2:5

Change the World!

In 1913, a young man about twenty years old took a walking tour in the rural province of Provence,¹ in southern France. A walking tour is when you hike through the countryside with a backpack and sleeping bag, traveling mainly on back roads or trails and sleeping at campsites or local farms or villages.

Provence was a rather barren and desolate area at the time, as it had been almost totally denuded of trees due to overcutting and too-intensive agriculture. The topsoil had then been washed away by the rains, as there were no tree roots to hold it in place.

Little farming was being done now because of the poor condition of the land. The villages were old and run-down, and most of the villagers had moved elsewhere. Even the wildlife had fled, as without trees the protective undergrowth had thinned, food was scarce, and few streams and ponds remained.

¹ pronounced “Pró-váhnce”

The young hiker stopped one night at the humble cottage of a shepherd, who, although gray-haired and in his midfifties, was still strong and stalwart. The young man spent the night there, enjoying the shepherd's hospitality, and he ended up staying several days with him.

The visitor observed with some curiosity that the shepherd spent his evening hours sorting nuts by lamplight—acorns, hazelnuts, chestnuts, and others. He would lay them down in a row, carefully examine them, cull out the bad ones, and when he had finally finished his evening's work, put the good nuts in a knapsack.

Then, as he led his sheep to graze the next day, he would plant the nuts along the way. While his sheep were pasturing in one area, he would walk several paces and thrust the end of his shepherd's staff into the ground, making a shallow hole. Then he would drop in one of his nuts and use his foot to cover it over with earth. Then he would walk several paces more, push his staff into the dry ground, and drop in another nut. He spent all his daylight hours walking over this region of Provence as he grazed his sheep, each day covering a different area where there were few trees, planting nuts.

Watching this, the young man wondered what in the world the shepherd was trying to do, so he finally asked him.

"Well, young man," the shepherd replied, "I'm planting trees."

“But why?” the young visitor asked. “It will be years and years before these trees ever get to where they could do *you* any good! You might not even live long enough to see them grow!”

The shepherd replied, “Yes, but some day they’ll do *somebody* some good and they’ll help to restore this dry land. I may never see it, but perhaps my children will.”

The young man marveled at the shepherd’s foresight, vision, and unselfishness, that he was willing to prepare the land for future generations, even though he might never see the results or reap the benefits himself.

Twenty years later, when in his forties, the hiker once again visited this same area and was astounded at what he saw. One great valley was completely covered with a beautiful forest of all kinds of trees. They were young trees, of course, but trees nevertheless. Life had sprung forth all over the valley! The grass had grown much greener, the shrubbery and the wildlife had returned, the soil was moist again, and the farmers were again cultivating their fields.

He wondered what had happened to the old shepherd, and to his amazement found that he was still alive, hale and hearty, still living in his little cottage—and still sorting his nuts each evening.

Our visitor then learned that a delegation from the French Parliament had recently come down from Paris to investigate what seemed to be a new natural forest. They eventually learned that the entire forest

had, in fact, been planted by this one shepherd as he watched his sheep, day by day and year after year. As a result, the whole valley was covered with beautiful young trees and underbrush. The delegation was so impressed and grateful to this shepherd for having reforested this entire area single-handedly that they persuaded Parliament to give him a special pension.

The visitor said he was amazed at the change, not only in the beautiful trees, but also in the revived agriculture, the renewed wildlife, and the beautiful lush grass and shrubbery. The little farms were thriving, and the villages seemed to have come to life again. What a contrast from when he had visited there twenty years before, when the villages had been run-down and abandoned!

Now all was thriving, just because of one man's foresight, one man's diligence, one man's patience, one man's sacrifice, one man's faithfulness just to do what one man could do, day by day, day in and day out for a number of years.

But that's not the end of the story. Remember how the young man told the shepherd, "You'll never live to see if you accomplished anything good or not"? Well, as it turned out, the shepherd lived to be eighty-nine. He did live to see his forest full-grown and beautiful, transforming an entire region. God blessed him with seeing the results of all his hard labors, how he had succeeded in changing his world. He lived to see what God had done through him.

It reminds me of what Paul wrote in the New Testament: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”¹

So if you’re sometimes discouraged with the world the way it is, don’t give up! We read that great empires and governments, armies and wars change the course of history and the face of the earth, so sometimes we’re discouraged and think, “Well, who am I? What can *I* do? It all seems so hopeless and impossible! It looks like there’s nothing that one person can do to change things for the better, so what’s the use of trying?”

But as proven by this humble shepherd, over a period of years one man *can* change the world! You may not be able to change the whole world, but you can change your *part* of the world. If you have changed just one life, you have changed a part of the world and you have proven that there is hope that it can *all* be changed! If one life can be changed, it shows that it’s possible that more lives can be changed. It can start with one person—maybe you!

Since my wife and I came to this city a few years ago, many lives have been changed. It has sometimes been very slow, trying, painstaking work with few results for all of our hard work, but lives are changing as a result of the many seeds that we have planted. It

¹ Galatians 6:9

was only the two of us at first, but now hundreds of others that we have won to Jesus are also telling others, planting seeds from which more new “trees” will grow. Everybody is talking about us and what we’re doing, our work, our faith and beliefs. We’re helping to change our part of the world!

It seemed like an impossible situation, but we just began planting the seeds of God’s Word and Christ’s love in the hearts of those around us. We didn’t try to change them all at once. We couldn’t. We just worked slowly, patiently, heart by heart, life by life, with tender loving care, day by day, year by year.

And now everyone is beginning to see the results and talking about them, and they are changing! A prominent physician who was at first quite skeptical about our efforts to spiritually influence people has since admitted that we are having a tremendous impact on the city. He said: “Our city has needed this for a long time. We’re rich materially, but we have not had the spiritual influence that you brought here, and it’s very needed.”

So we have affected this town. Not everybody has come to know Jesus, but nearly everyone has heard the message of God’s love. Many have visited us and experienced the love of God and the truth of His Word that we share with them, little by little, day by day, person by person, heart by heart, seed by seed. Now a whole new forest is beginning to grow and be seen, so that people are talking about it and marveling!

You can do it too! Start with your own heart, your own mind, your own spirit, your own life, by receiving Jesus into your life, reading His Word, and putting its principles into practice in your life. Change your life, your home, your family, and you've changed a whole world—*your* world!

Then you and your little family can start trying to change your neighbors and friends and the people you come in contact with from day to day. You can make a special effort to reach lonely, hungry, needy hearts who are seeking love, seeking truth, seeking they know not what, but seeking happiness—desperately seeking to satisfy their yearning hearts that are so empty and barren and desolate for lack of the water of God's Word and the warm sunshine of His love.

You can start individually, personally, just you or your little family, planting seeds, one by one, in heart after heart, day by day, by doing loving deeds for others and by telling them about Jesus. You could also give or recommend Christian materials to those you meet, to help them understand God's Word. Patiently plant the seeds of the truth of God's Word into that empty hole of an empty heart, then cover it with God's love, and trust the great, warm, loving sunshine of His Spirit and the water of His Word to bring forth the miracle of new life.

It may seem only a tiny little bud at first, just a little sprig, just one insignificant little green shoot. What is that to the forest that's needed? Well, it's a

beginning. It's the beginning of the miracle of new life, and it will thrive and grow and flourish and become great and strong, a whole new "tree," a whole new life, and maybe a whole new world!

Sometimes it doesn't take a lot to change someone's life. It reminds me of something that happened while my family and I were visiting the Montreal World's Fair in 1967. One day I took my mother, who at eighty years of age was still an enthusiastic Christian, to tour the Soviet exhibit. As we entered the pavilion, the director, a tall, clean-cut, good-looking young Russian, came forward and offered a wheelchair to my mother. Then, for some reason, he volunteered to escort her around the pavilion and explain it to her.

For the next two hours, they became quite interested in each other and engrossed in deep conversation as he pointed out to her the various new inventions on display. But as I found out later, they talked about a lot more than just mechanical gadgets. At the end of our visit, he bade us a fond farewell, saying, "Please come again!" He was quite hospitable and seemed to have become very close to my mother in that time that they talked together.

A few weeks later we received a letter from him in which he said, "You have changed my life! I have received Christ as you suggested. You have changed my whole way of thinking, my way of believing; you have changed *me!* But I have a wife and three children

and I am living in a communist society where it is against the law to practice Christianity, so *now* what do I do?”

My mother’s advice to that young man in the letter she wrote back to him was, in essence, “Change the world! Change the world you’re living in! Start now! Tell others what God has done for you, what His love and His truth have done for you personally, and you can start changing your part of the world—even a communist world!”

If you’re faithful to plant seeds of God’s love, like the old shepherd that the government rewarded for his efforts, God is going to reward you one of these days when you finally come to your reward. He’s going to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

You *can* change the world! Start today! Change your own life, change your family, change your home, change your neighbors, change your town, change your country. *Change the world!*

Afterword

How can you know beyond a doubt that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, the way to salvation? The answer is simple: Try Him! Simply humble yourself and sincerely ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Ask Him to come into your heart, forgive you for all your sins, and fill your life with His love, peace and joy.

Jesus is real and He loves you—so much so that He suffered for your sins and died in your place so that you wouldn't have to, if you'll just receive Him and His forgiveness and His free gift of eternal life. But He can't save you unless you want Him to. His love is all-powerful, but He won't force His way into your life.

Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."¹ He gently knocks at the door of your heart. He doesn't break it down or force His way in. He stands there meekly, lovingly, patiently, waiting for you to open your life and ask Him in.

¹Revelation 3:20

Will you receive Him? If so, He will be your closest friend and companion, who will be with you always! He came for love and lived in love and died for love, that we might live and love forever!

You can receive Jesus into your heart right now by sincerely praying this simple prayer:

“Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all the wrongs I’ve done. I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. I open the door to my heart and invite You to come in. Please come in, Jesus, and give me eternal life. Then help me to share Your love and truth with others. Amen.”

God has promised to answer your prayer, so you are now His child. And He has said that He will *never* leave you nor forsake you! He loves you that much!

About the author

David Brandt Berg (1919–1994) dared to be different—so different that his back-to-the-basics approach to Christianity started a worldwide missionary movement.

Berg's parents were both active Christian pastors and evangelists, and his early years were spent traveling with them in evangelistic work. In 1941 he nearly died of pneumonia, shortly after being drafted into the U.S. Army. After determining to rededicate his life to Christian service, he experienced a miraculous healing.

For most of the next twenty-seven years he worked as a pastor and in various evangelistic endeavors until, in 1968, he received God's call to take the Gospel to the hippies of southern California. There he and his then teen-aged children began a ministry to the youth that grew and eventually became known as *The Family*. Today, members of *The Family* engage in missionary and humanitarian work in over one hundred countries worldwide.

Berg called on his followers to devote their full time to spreading the message of Christ's love and salvation as

far and wide as possible, unfettered by convention or tradition, and to teach others to do the same.

Berg also decried the de-Christianization and decay in moral values of Western society. He viewed the trend toward a New World Order as setting the stage for the rise of the Antichrist, a godless world dictator whom the Bible predicts will rule the world in the last days before Christ's return.

Berg's lively, down-to-earth, and sometimes unconventional approach to heavenly matters makes his writings a unique contribution to Christian literature. He once said of his writings that his aim was to leave his readers feeling either "mad, sad or glad." Without a doubt, he succeeded in doing just that.

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