

In Returning and Rest

by Helen Ernst

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Isaiah 30:15

Introduction

Recently, my daughter Rebekah and I made a road trip to the Southern Oregon coast, where my husband, Michael, and I first met. We chose to drive up the 101 and as we left Santa Rosa, I noticed the sign for Boonville up ahead. I reminded Rebekah of my adventures in Boonville back in 1969, and she said, "Let's turn off and go see where you lived."



We found the exact address by doing some Internet research. The ranch with its many trailers and tomato gardens was now a vineyard, and the only indication we found of its former purposes was an eerie sign in a meadow where trailers used to house the recruits of the Unification Church who came every weekend for seminars on God's purpose in history. Standing in that meadow brought back a flood of memories, and reminded me again of the amazing power of the Holy Spirit to draw the wayward ones to the cross with His cords of kindness (Hosea 11:4).

This is story of how Jesus drew one very confused and lost flower child of the 60's to Himself.

Caveat: The events I am describing took place 40 years ago at a time when my mind was clouded. The description I have written is the best I can remember, but my memory often has gaps and I am well aware how over the years our subconscious can weave fact and fantasy together. I've tried to be as accurate as possible; what is truest in this story is the power of God to deliver.

California Dreaming

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Psalm 19:1

In the late summer and fall of 1969, I was one of many "flower children" living on the streets of San Francisco. Lured by the almost mystical stories I was hearing about life in California, I joined a VW bus full of acquaintances from Ann Arbor, Michigan for a month long back packing trip in Yosemite. The experience was life shattering for me. Five years of school and the intense intellectual life in Ann Arbor during the turbulent 60's had left me emotionally and spiritually depleted. Running through campus streets to avoid teargas, marching against the Vietnam war in Washington DC, experimenting with LSD, harvesting marijuana in rural Michigan, adopting a bohemian lifestyle with my Jewish roommate, reading Russian history and studying communism, searching for truth in Eastern mysticism...all had left me emotionally bruised and still unsatisfied.

The month of purity and simplicity in Yosemite somehow confronted me with an elemental truth about the grandeur of creation that I had lost in all the intellectualism and political

controversy of my college years. What kind of mind could have created such greatness? Surely not just random forces, as I had been taught to believe.

When my friends headed back to Ann Arbor at the end of the month, I decided to stay in California. I had a friend who had moved to Berkley and looked him up. At first I camped in his backyard, but soon wore out my welcome. I began moving from place to place with other seekers like myself, enjoying what fellowship I could find on the streets. The charms of this survival life style rapidly evaporated.

A New Opportunity

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. 1 Tim 4:1

One day, walking through the Haight-Ashbury district, I encountered a young woman I had known at the University of Michigan. She was not a close friend...but someone I had enjoyed, even though she traveled in a very different circle of friends...she was in a sorority while I prided myself on belonging to an intellectual set that looked down on such social groups.

However, under the circumstances I was relieved to meet someone I knew and to talk a bit about old times. After asking me some questions about what I was doing, she began to share her story of an exciting new phase in her life that she thought I might be interested in. Like me, she said, she had been searching for understanding and a higher purpose she could devote herself to. Recently she had found a wonderful community where people genuinely loved each other and were working toward a common goal of creating and extending hope and peace, based on respect and honor for all people. She invited me to come and meet the group at their communal home, an old Victorian mansion closer to the Financial district.

I didn't hesitate to say yes. Whatever she had found sounded a lot better than what I was experiencing on the streets. Despite the feel-good philosophies of the flower children, I was finding the realities of our life style less than appealing. In the places where we congregated, you were likely to find everything you owned taken in the morning when you woke. While some fellow hippies would offer to share what they had, many others simply assumed whatever you had was theirs. I still had a little money from savings, but it was rapidly disappearing. Recently I had begun to see the more violent, ugly side of trusting unknown people, and disillusionment had replaced my starry eyed hopes of California dreaming.

Meeting the Unification Church

That night, I showed up at my friend's address for dinner. This was followed by a time of singing, then a spirited presentation on how God had a purpose for each of our lives, followed by a few lively songs. All this took place in an atmosphere of cheerful enthusiasm. Everyone I met seemed genuinely interested in me. They asked questions, listened thoughtfully and expressed warmth and concern. I couldn't wait to come back. Most of the people I met were young men and women about my age; a small group of older Asian men and women stayed mainly in the background, cooking, serving, and observing.

A few days later, I found myself on a bus, heading to a previously unknown destination north of the city...a ranch in Boonville. There I would attend a special introductory weekend,

where I would find out more about the “family,” as I now called them. We sang songs and conversed on the bus. The young woman next to me asked me probing questions about my beliefs, what I thought about God, what I wanted in life, and seemed genuinely interested in my responses.

She stayed close to me the entire weekend, asking more questions, making sure I understood what was happening, introducing me to others, getting food for me at meal times and helping me get settled at night. We were busy every minute! After a lecture the first night, we stayed up late around the campfire singing rousing songs. We were up early for exercises, then breakfast, then more study. This was followed by work projects—we cleared land for a tomato garden—then lunch, more study in the afternoon, dinner, another lecture, then testimonies from family members around the campfire. Sunday was much like Saturday, but instead of work projects, we had a church service, with singing and a message about God’s eternal purpose to bring His messiah to show mankind how to live. Sunday night around the campfire, we were given the opportunity to choose to join this community and become part of God’s redemptive purpose. My new friend turned to me and asked me if I would like to join. It seemed only natural to take this next step and I said yes.

The idea that I could actually be part of a positive redemptive movement really appealed to me. After my early years of militant activism at the University of Michigan involving dabbling with the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and deep study of communism, I had increasingly turned away from activism to spiritual search. The thought of combining the two had not occurred to me.

I moved into the house the next day, which was pretty simple, since I was currently homeless. My new sisters took me shopping and bought me a couple of outfits so I could look presentable when “seekers” came to visit at the house, and I began intensively studying the books they gave me that presented their ideas, many written by Koreans. I soon discovered that behind the movement was a shadowy figure of a man named Sun Myung Moon, but I wasn’t yet clear on his role.

From San Francisco to Boonville

Living in the house was difficult for me. Though I felt safe for the first time in months, I was used to freedom and a casual lifestyle. I was on edge feeling that I didn’t fit in. Then a totally unexpected opportunity came up: they needed additional staff on the ranch in Boonville. Perfect, I thought. In my heart, I was still looking for a way back to “nature” and the simplicity and beauty I had experienced in Yosemite. Boonville would be similar, far away from city streets, with only a small team during the week. Surprisingly enough, the elders accepted my offer. The next weekend I was on my way to Boonville in the bus, but this time to stay.

I got to know the team at the ranch and we soon established a pleasant rhythm of life. I was given cooking duties and enjoyed making yogurt, cinnamon rolls, and granola from scratch. The leader of the ranch had a background that was similar to mine, and still had a fondness for organic, back to nature foods. After morning devotions, breakfast, and exercises, we would work in the gardens, clean and prepare for the coming weekend. Evenings were spent reading and concluded with group devotions.

Sometimes we visited local churches or social groups that met during the week. We wanted the town’s residents to accept us and see us as a positive influence in the community. I don’t think we could have been very successful. When a group of four or five of us would

enter a meeting room, every eye in the room seemed to track our progress and conversations were generally stilted and difficult.

Growing Deeper: What is True?

I still didn't really understand what was going on. In addition to the books the family gave me, we read the Bible. I found myself often putting away the obscure and difficult books by Korean family members and being strangely attracted to reading the Bible. I had been raised by God-fearing Lutheran parents. We attended church and Sunday school regularly and as a child, I had loved to read Bible stories and participate in church activities. But as a teenager, I had grown out of my parent's religion. They didn't seem to be able to provide compelling answers to the questions I raised about creation, good and evil, social justice, the evils done in the name of Christianity throughout history. And I soon came to dismiss the entire Christian church as the "opiate of the masses," that socialist thinkers identified. The church seemed to me to be a great oppressor, both socially and intellectually.

My parents, intimidated by my verbal challenges, retreated, although they both constantly prayed for my heart to change. By the time I graduated from high school I had turned my back on everything I had ever known as a child. I was determined to break away from mindless tradition and find real truth.

Now the memories of childhood experiences flooding back into my heart as I sat alone with the Bible. What if I had been wrong? What if this book really did contain the answers I was seeking? My new friends had a great respect for Jesus, but they felt that he had failed. Looking at the state of the world and the triumph of evil in so many areas, I could certainly agree with that. If Jesus came to establish righteousness, something had gone drastically wrong. But there was also a gnawing doubt. All the scriptures I had learned as a child would come rushing back. Didn't Jesus say that his kingdom was not of this world? If so, then wouldn't it be wrong to expect to see righteousness and peace here?

I shared some of these questions with the other staff at the ranch during devotions and discussion times. They began to explain to me how when Jesus died on the cross, his life was cut off early so he was not able to complete the purpose for which he had been sent, which was to restore a perfect Godly family and usher in God's kingdom. Since the time of Christ, God's purpose had not changed, they said, and now God had sent another man to complete what Jesus failed to do. Now I began to clearly understand the role of Sun Yung Moon in the theology of the family.

Some days, all this looked plausible, and on the days it did not, life was pleasant enough for me to be able to push the questions aside. But as weeks stretched into months, denying my uncertainties became progressively more difficult. Weekend after weekend, buses came with new recruits and I witnessed them experiencing the same carefully orchestrated events that I had participated in. It began to seem a little staged...why couldn't people openly and freely ask questions? Why was everyone so busy every minute? When I watched the girl that had befriended me on my first weekend behaving exactly the same toward other young women again and again, I could not help question whether she had really been my "friend," or if the careful pairing I saw was part of a larger strategy to contain and manipulate the newcomers.

Escape

Eventually, my discomfort became increasingly acute, simultaneously with a visit from a Korean dignitary to the ranch. This man was high up in the family and he was coming to inspect the activities at the ranch. There were many tense conversations about what would please him and how we could best show our commitment to the family. We cleaned and cooked and tried to make everything perfect.

During the days this dignitary and his group were at the ranch, there were many conversations with low voices. One day I was in the kitchen in the main meeting trailer, and overheard the low voices outside. They were discussing me! The ranch leader was expressing concern about my spiritual state, indicating that I had been asking many questions and didn't really seem convinced of the view of history that was presented in the family. One of the Korean dignitaries suggested that I should be sent back to the house in San Francisco, where the opportunities for education (and supervision) were more intense. He then said, perhaps a marriage would help. The last thing I heard was, "She shall come back to San Francisco with us tomorrow," and then their voices drifted off as they continued walking.

A marriage? I began to think about bits and pieces of conversations I had heard, stories of large group weddings. One girl had told me that her friend was married in Korea to a man she had never met, and she was so happy that the Pappa San in the house had selected the right mate for her. I had dismissed this as an oddity, but now I realized that this was the way all relationships in the family started.



Just to reinforce the reality of what was happening, here is a picture taken in 2009 of 10,000 couples from around the world who participated in a mass wedding ceremony arranged by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church at Sun Moon University in Asan, south of Seoul, South Korea.

A cold chill went through me. What had I gotten myself into? The idea of returning to San Francisco was suddenly abhorrent. I determined right

then that I needed to get away. When the trailer where the girls slept was empty in the afternoon, I snuck back and searched for my backpack and sleeping bag, which had been stored in the back of the closet. I placed them under my bed and began to gather the few clothes and personal items that I owned.

That night, I lay down with the other girls but didn't sleep. I listened to their breathing until I was sure that all of them were asleep, then quietly pulled out my backpack. Holding my shoes, I slipped out of the bedroom, opened the front door, and strode quickly down the driveway. When I was out of sight, I stopped long enough to put on my shoes and jacket then hurried down the driveway to the main road. I walked into town, found a sheltered spot, and curled up in my sleeping bag, waiting the light of early morning to find a ride to freedom.

On the Road Again

God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land. Psalm 68:6

When I left the ranch, I had only the vaguest of plans. I had heard how beautiful the Mendocino coast was and that many hippies gathered there. It was close and seemed like my best option at the moment. Beneath the practical questions of where I would stay and how I would live, I had an underlying intention.

In addition to the few clothes and personal items I had brought with me, I had packed a Bible and a copy of Sun Myung Moon's *Divine Principle*. Moon's book expressed the overarching philosophy of his movement, examining the purposes of God from the creation of Adam and Eve through biblical history and up to today. I was determined to examine this book in the light of the Bible and figure out exactly what I believed. In the family, I had heard a lot about the power of fasting and I was also determined to fast until God revealed himself to me.

In the early morning light, I got a ride from a passing car to Mendocino, and found my way to a state park and camp ground. During the day, I would go down to the beach or sit on one of the cliffs overlooking the ocean. At night I would find a sheltered spot in the camp grounds to sleep. Sometimes I would join other groups of young people who were camping in the park. It wasn't long until I tired of reading the *Divine Principle*. Somehow, it all just sounded pompous and empty. But I spent many hours reading the Bible and wondering at the words and stories. Could this actually be true?

While I don't remember many details about this time, one incident stands out in my memory. In the park was an enclosed public lodge with picnic tables and a fireplace. Day campers used it for meals, and I often hung out there trying to stay warm on the foggy coast. One evening I was sitting on the floor near the fireplace with my head leaning back against the wall, half dozing, and half watching the people around me. It had been several days since I had eaten anything and I was lost in my own private world.

I found myself drawn into watching one near-by family as they prepared a meal...mom, dad, a couple of children. There was nothing special about this family, other than a certain sweetness in the way they interacted. The kids didn't talk back to the parents. The older brother was genuinely solicitous of his younger sister, helping her carry loads that were heavy and patiently showing her how to set the table. Their love for each other was unmistakable.

As I watched them, I found my heart strangely aching. A great longing came over me to be part of a family again. Why did I feel like I had always been on the outside looking in, I wondered. As their meal preparations concluded, the family sat down and the mother prepared plates for each one. Then the four of them took each other's hands across the picnic table, bowed their heads, and the dad gave thanks to God for His goodness, His provision, and for sending Jesus. When the Amen was said, the mom took one of the plates piled with food and handed it to the little girl. I saw her whispering something to her. Then the child rose from her place, carefully holding the plate and walked in my direction.

"Are you hungry?" she asked. "My mom wants you to have this." I couldn't say much, but asked her to thank her mother for her kindness. Yes, I was hungry, but it wasn't just for the physical food. I was consumed with a longing to be at peace, to be reconciled with my

parents, to have real friends who knew me and who I knew. And I was pretty sure that somehow the God they had given thanks to held the key to how that might happen.

Missing Family

So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Psalm 81:12

At this point, you may be wondering how I came to be so isolated from my own family. I am the youngest of three children. All three of us were adopted as infants or toddlers by my parents. My older brother and sister, however, were actually birth siblings. In my mind, they always seemed to have a lot in common and I felt like an oddity, unlike anyone else in my family.

Even though I grew up well loved and cared for in every way, I harbored a private sense of rejection and felt that I did not belong. Many of the stories I wrote or fantasized as a child were about children taken captive by Indians and eventually rescued by strong heroes. I think these stories represented my subconscious feeling of being taken away from where I really belonged and raised by others. I was waiting for the ones who had lost me to find me again.

I eventually came to understand these feelings as a stronghold that Satan planted in my mind from childhood. This is a common strategy he uses with children who have been adopted. Because of these beliefs, I withdrew from those who loved me most.

In addition to this deception about adoption, which controlled my thinking, I was by nature a stubborn and prideful person. I had a reputation in school (which I was proud of) of always being right. I would argue my position with teachers and fellow students and not back down, and even jumped at the opportunity to show teachers their errors when they misspoke. I lived in a black and white world. And while I was quick to show others their errors, I had a very hard time admitting when I was wrong and asking for forgiveness. This poisonous combination of background and personality kept me walking down a path toward destruction long after others would have admitted their mistakes.

Though my parents supported me through college, they became increasingly distressed by my life style. At first I hid most of what I was doing from them; my dad was paying my school bills, and I didn't want to endanger that. But I became progressively bolder and more outspoken in my opinions. After I graduated, they began to realize more clearly exactly how I was living and pretty much let me go my own way, hoping I am sure that I would come to my senses. I kept in contact with them, but only through infrequent and distant conversations. After I joined the Moonies, all communication with them ceased. The Moonies discouraged us from contacting family and since I already felt cut off from mine, going along with this policy wasn't difficult.

I cannot imagine what that period in their life was like. I never thought about it deeply until I had children of my own (the first at age 37). What torments they experienced are still beyond my imagination. But that particular evening in the Mendocino State Park was the first time I felt my heart beginning to grieve over where my path had led me.

Still Stubborn

Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Despite moments of insight, I still had a distance to go before I came to the end of my rebellious ways. I met a group of young people visiting Mendocino from Marysville and struck up a friendship with one of the girls who was very outgoing and self-confident. After the group's time of camping was over, she asked me if I wanted to go back to Marysville with them and I agreed. She had been living on the road and working the system for a long time and was quite knowledgeable about survival techniques: where we could stay for free, what was safe and what wasn't. In Marysville, she took me to a government office where they gave me food stamps and a small emergency fund, based on the story she coached me to tell.

Using her intimate knowledge of free places to stay, we ended up at an A-frame house in the hills above Marysville in an area called Rackerby. Young people came and went randomly here; they would stay for a few days and move on. We stayed there often, hitchhiking down to Marysville together to pick up food stamps and replenish our supplies and visit her friends.

Gradually, I got to know many of the people moving through the area. Next door to the place where we stayed was an old goat farm. It was another hippie commune, but I heard many dark stories about it and was warned not to stay there, especially at night. Many occult activities had taken place there, I was told, and evil spirits caused unexplained events and oppressions.

A nearby creek had a lovely swimming hole, where I met people who were staying at the goat farm. After I got to know some of them, I would go and visit them on the farm, but only during the day. One of my new friends was a young man who had returned from a tour in Vietnam. He was hard and intense and a little intimidating...clearly scarred by his experience and seemed much older than his physical age. His girl friend was a 15-year old run away, with a baby face that made her look even younger. We often talked together about spiritual topics. The young man—Steve—was acutely aware of the darkness at the goat farm. He told me with fear in his voice that he had seen strange manifestation and objects move for no reason. The spiritual world seemed very real to him.

Light Breaks Through

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:13

Steve disappeared for a while. I didn't think much of this, as people were always coming and going. But then one day he showed up again, returning with a specific purpose.

He had been visiting a friend in Davis—a former resident of the goat farm—who had become a Christian a few months before. When Steve had visited his friend previously, he had been especially intrigued by discussions of the end times based on a book called *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey that everyone was then reading. His friend invited Steve to attend a meeting where Steve had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. "Helen," he told me, "Jesus is real. This is what you've been looking for." He shared the same message

with everyone who would listen at the house where I stayed and at the goat farm, inviting us to come to Davis and find out for ourselves. He said that Jesus had sent him to tell us about a power greater than the fear and darkness.

The next day, when Steve went back to Davis, he had persuaded his girl friend to go with him. I went along too, determined to find out what he was talking about. Steve told me that he knew that he and Sue could no longer be together, but he said there was a house for guys and one for girls where we could stay. Clearly, something powerful had happened to him.

When we got to Davis, the "meeting" had already started. The room was packed with young people. Several young men and girls with guitars were leading songs. All over the room people stood with arms raised to heaven, some with tears on their cheeks. I had never seen or heard anything like this. Not once had Steven ever used the word "church" to describe what was going on, and I still didn't connect this experience with church...although indeed it was a church meeting.

The singing continued for a while, rising and falling in intensity. Everyone seemed to know the songs, even without song sheets. Later, someone gave a message. I don't remember the message, or even responding to it; I just remember the sense of the presence of holiness in that room and the feeling of finally being safe.

I was graciously welcomed into the crowded girls' home. The details of the next few weeks a blur, but the Lord had me in His grip and His Word, like a hammer and fire, was breaking down all my rebellion and resistance. Later I think I went up to the altar during services at least three or four times to receive the Lord, because every time the pastor talked about this needing to be a specific event, I could not remember the exact point when I had done so. Even later, I realized that it was more about Jesus receiving me, than me receiving Him. The first night I walked through those doors, He had enfolded me and would not let me go. My understanding of what happened took a little while to catch up with the reality, but this prodigal daughter had come home, and the Father had run to meet me and enfold me in His robe of righteousness.

Family Reunited

And he will turn...the hearts of the children to their fathers... Malachi 4:6

I came into the girls' house in Davis a traumatized, fearful and broken person, and the Lord began to gently restore me. The first thing I needed to do, I realized, was contact my parents. I wrestled with how to do this, feeling that my sinfulness and rebellion was almost beyond their forgiveness and that they would be unlikely to want to have anything to do with me. I could not bring myself to call them, so I sat down and wrote a letter. I explained where I was living and what had happened to me. I told them that I had met Jesus and He had forgiven me, and I asked for their forgiveness. A few days later, the doorbell rang and someone called me downstairs. I had received a telegram. It was from my parents saying "Hallelujah. Call us collect."

My parents of course were overjoyed. I found out later that my mother had contacted many radio ministries across the country asking them to pray for me. She attended many prayer groups in their city, and she and my dad had even begun to attend a non-denominational church on Sunday nights where the pastor often preached on the miracle-working power of

the Holy Spirit. In their need, they had drawn close to the Lord, claiming His protection over me, and now they were seeing the fruit of their prayers.

A short time later, my mom and dad sent me a Bible, and when I opened it, tears filled my eyes. Inscribed on the inside cover was "To our precious daughter, Helen. Christmas, 1970." It was now late summer of 1971. They had purchased this Bible in faith the previous



Christmas as a gift for me, not knowing where I was, but believing that the day would come when I would welcome it. As I spread this Bible open in my hands, a sense of the power our covenant-keeping God almost overwhelmed me. He had known me and in all my wanderings, His unseen Hand had never been removed.

It would be several months before my parents and I actually met each other face to face. My church was planning to visit a fellowship in Victoria British Canada and—by a coincidence clearly orchestrated by the Holy Spirit—my mom and dad had signed up for a train trip to Victoria through my dad's place of work. They were going to be in Victoria the exact same dates as the church. During those few days we shared together, I was able to meet my mom and dad in a neutral location and begin the process of healing our relationship. Later, I would go home for a lengthier visit.

This is one of the few pictures I have from this time, one my mother took of

my dad and me on the street in Victoria. I was wearing my "Jesus People" uniform of a long skirt and loose top, and though you can't see it very well, I was also wearing a smile of joy, the more genuine sign of the Lord's gracious touch on my life. Notice that this is my dad on vacation...still wearing his tie and dress shirt as if he were reporting to the office!

Jesus People: Revival Fire

And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:46

At first I did not realize that my experience, which was so deeply personal, was part of a larger movement that was affecting young people throughout the United States and even elsewhere in the world. God was pouring out His Spirit in marvelous ways to pull back a generation on the brink of destruction based on the heartfelt intercession of untold saints.

My memories of that first year of following Jesus are full of a sense of holiness and awe. God was moving in a truly wonderful way and every time we met together we expected and received intense encounters with His truth and power. Our fellowship met in a public hall and consisted almost entirely of young people under the age of 25. Some were college students from UC Davis, but many like me, were refugees from the hippie life.

Our pastor was from New Zealand, a fiery preacher full of zeal. His wife was warm and motherly and a great comforter. Church services were long...I remember being in services most of Sunday. We would arrive early for prayer and pre-service worship. During the service, we would often have extended times of free-form worship. We had many talented musicians and guitar players. Often the Lord would give one of them a spontaneous new song, which they would sing out and the other musicians would follow along. It was an amazing experience to hear these songs flowing out in perfect rhyme and measure, knowing that they were being birthed in that very moment by the power of the Spirit. At times we felt like the angels themselves were singing with us.

At almost every service, people were getting saved. Young men and women with hollow haunted eye, wearing dirty clothes would come in with back packs and bed rolls. The next week, you would see them again with a new countenance, wearing clean clothes, lifting their hands with joy. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit was real and tangible.

After the service, we would have potluck lunches before going out in the streets to witness. We would gather on street corners in Sacramento. Someone would play guitar and the rest of us would talk with those who walked by about the power of Jesus. Later we returned to the church for evening Bible study.

The pastor was in the middle of teaching a series on the Tabernacle of Moses. This may seem like an unlikely topic for nourishing a bunch of spaced-out ex-hippies, but I was enthralled by the revelation of the pattern of salvation that he drew from the various furnishing and layout of the Tabernacle. He showed how each piece reflected some aspect of Christ, who was the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed by the patterns of Old Testament worship. It was like someone opened a treasure chest in front of me, and suddenly all those dry, dusty stories became rich and vibrant and alive with meaning.

To this day, I am grateful for that series of teaching, which instilled in me a deep love for the Old Testament and an early knowledge of the unity of scripture. I have since met many believers who have focused almost entirely on the New Testament and lack the depth and richness of understanding that comes from seeing the new in light of the old.

Holiness, Repentance, and Adoption

"When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Gal 4:4-6

Most of us who had partaken of drugs, rebellion, and free love left that lifestyle with deep scars that the Lord began to heal. In the girls' home, we had a basement room that we set apart as a prayer chapel. Individual girls would go to the basement to spend time alone seeking the Lord in prayer. I can remember often hearing the sound of weeping rising from that room and I recall my own times of tears and groaning as I lay in deep repentance before the Lord. Job's words capture my experience: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Any dust and ashes in that basement room would have been quickly used up by the stream of young women casting their burdens on the Lord.

I had prided myself on my intelligence, graduating first in my high school class with a full semester of AP college classes completed. I had risen above the simple faith of my parents and pursued deeper enlightenment. But all that pursuit had led me into greater and greater

darkness, until the God of the Bible reached out and rescued me from my foolish ways. Like Jacob, I would in some ways forever walk with a limp, a reminder of the weakness of who I am in the flesh and of God's ultimate sovereignty.

During that first year, I had one special encounter with the Holy Spirit that was truly transformative. This happened when a guest speaker brought a message on adoption based on Galatians 4: 4-6. The Holy Spirit exposed the dark and painful part of my mind that saw adoption as rejection and resulting in me being somehow second-class. God spoke very clearly to me that adoption was the method He had chosen to build His family, the church. In fact, it is the only way to become part of His family and have a relationship with Him. He showed me that it was actually a privilege that I was allowed to experience adoption twice for adoption even in the natural realm is more closely modeled on our relationship with God than natural birth because adoption involves choosing to love without any compulsion. It is hard to put into words the impact that this revelation had on me, but it was as if a dark oppression that had been part of me for as long as I could remember was suddenly gone. This is the life-giving and bondage-breaking power of truth.

Epilogue

Once we were cleaned up from the hippie life style, the hard work of learning how to walk in a manner that pleased the Lord began. For many of us, our minds and self images had to be rebuilt as God laid a foundation for His character in our hearts. This was hard work. The simple realities of being responsible, getting a job, being accountable to one another, and living in the "real world" at times were overwhelming. And of course, eventually some turned away.

At the same time, weeds began to grow up among the good grain. I remember the first time I encountered a group from the "Children of God" on the streets in Sacramento. They greeted us as Christian brothers and sisters, but something seemed a little strange about them. Soon we were hearing of friends that had joined this group, and then rumors of their drug use, justified by a teaching that marijuana was one of "herbs of the field" that God had given us to enjoy. The sad reality was that wolves in sheep clothing had arrived.

The fellowship where I had found the Lord experienced its own crisis when our senior pastor took a sabbatical and traveled to India. This lively Pentecostal preacher returned as a bishop in the Syrio-Chaldean Church, which traced its lineage from the first-century visit of the Apostle Thomas to India. The first Sunday that he preached, we arrived for the service to see our good friends dressed in robes as altar boys and swinging incense censers. The pastor followed in elaborate robes holding a bishop's staff. The order of service was printed and handed to us, with chants and recitations.

Most of us stood in shocked disbelief. In addition to our senior pastor, we had two associate pastors. Within a few weeks, the church had split in three directions with some of the flock following each of these men. I, however, was unable to follow any of them, finding the whole situation so painful and repugnant that I could not see myself remaining where I was. When a friend asked me if I would like to take care of her house for six months in southern Oregon I gladly accepted. It was there—when my next-door neighbor sent her handsome, single younger brother over to take my trash to the dump—that the Lord opened up a new and unexpected chapter in my life. But that belongs to another story for another day....