

# PRISON TO PRAISE

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## Prisoner

There was the touch of cold metal against my left wrist and the harsh voice in my ear: "This is the FBI. You are under arrest."

I'd been relaxing in the back seat of the car with my left arm hanging out the window. The car was stolen and I was AWOL from the Army.

Being AWOL didn't bother me. It was the getting caught that hurt my pride. How could I have been stupid enough to get into a mess like this?

I'd been a pretty independent fellow from the time I was twelve. That's when my father died suddenly, leaving my mother alone with three boys to raise. My brothers were seven and one, and Mother started taking in washing and went on relief to keep us alive. She always talked about Dad being in Heaven and how God would take care of us, but with the intensity of a twelve-year-old I turned in fury against a God who could treat us that way.

I delivered papers after school until long after dark each night, determined to make my way in life. I was going to make the most of it. I felt I had it coming. I had a right to grab for all I could get.

When Mother remarried, I went to live with some of Dad's old friends. I went to high school, but never quit working. After school and all summer I worked--as a food packer, shipping clerk, linotype operator, and one summer as a lumberjack in Pennsylvania.

I started college, but ran out of money and had to go to work. This time I got a job with B&W Steel as a steel chipper and grinder. Not a very pleasant job, but it kept me in top physical condition.

I never did want to join the Army. I wanted to go off to sea with the Merchant Marine. I couldn't think of a more glamorous way to get into action in World War II.

To join the Merchant Marine I had to get reclassified 1-A with the draft board that had given me a deferment to go to college. Before I could make it back to the Merchant Marine, the Army inducted me. So, against all my efforts, I landed in basic training at Ft. McClellan, Alabama.

I was bored to death. The training was a breeze, and looking for excitement, I volunteered for airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

I was thrilled when we got our first chance to jump from an airplane in flight. This was living, the kind of excitement I was hungering for! I was a paratrooper, and earned the honor of wearing the glistening jump boots.

Still, I wanted more excitement and volunteered for advanced training as a Demolition Expert. After demolition school I returned to Fort Benning to wait for orders to go overseas. I pulled guard at the stockade, had KP, and waited some more. Patience was not my strong point. At the rate the Army was moving, I figured I might miss out on the war altogether, scrubbing pots and pans till the war ended.

I wasn't going to sit around doing nothing, and with a friend, I decided to go over the hill.

We simply walked out of the camp one day, stole a car, and headed for anyplace. Just in case someone was looking for us, we dropped the first car and stole another and finally ended up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There we ran out of spending money and decided to pull a stickup.

I had the gun and my friend waited in the car. We'd picked a store that looked like an easy job. My plan was to pull the telephone wiring so they couldn't call the police. Inside the store, I yanked on the telephone wire as hard as I could, but it wouldn't budge. I was frustrated. The gun was in my pocket, the cash register was full of money, but the line to the police was still there. I wasn't about to invite disaster.

So I went back to the car to tell my buddy, and we were just sitting there in the back seat, eating green apples and talking, when the long arm of the law finally caught up with us. We didn't know it, but a six-state alarm had gone out for us, and the FBI was hot on our heels.

Our search for adventure had ended in a pretty sad flop. I was back in the stockade at Fort Benning where I'd been

a guard only a few months earlier. I was sentenced to six months' confinement and immediately started a campaign to get overseas. My fellow prisoners laughed and said, "You wouldn't have gone AWOL if you wanted to go overseas."

I kept insisting I'd gone AWOL because I got bored waiting to be sent overseas.

At last my pleas were heard. I was placed on overseas shipment and went under guard to Camp Kilmer, N.J., where I was placed in the stockade to wait for our ship to Europe.

At last, I was on my way. Almost, anyway. The night before our ship was due to sail I was called to the Commander's office, where I learned that I wouldn't be sailing with the rest of the men.

"The FBI wants you held and returned to Pittsburgh."

Once more I felt the cold steel of handcuffs, and under armed guard I returned to Pittsburgh, where a stern judge read the charges and asked: "Guilty or not guilty; how do you plead?"

"Guilty, Sir." I had been caught red-handed and I determined it would be the last time. I would learn the tricks and play it safe from now on.

The district attorney carefully explained my past life to the judge, who asked the investigating officers for their recommendation.

"Your honor, we recommend leniency."

"What do you want, soldier?" the judge asked me.

"I want to go back in the Army and get into the war," was all I could say.

"I sentence you to five years in the Federal Penitentiary."

His words hit me like a load of bricks from the skies. I was nineteen and would be twenty-four when I got out. I saw my whole life go down the drain.

"Your sentence is temporarily suspended and you will be returned to the Army."

Saved, thank heaven! In less than an hour I was released. But first the district attorney gave me a stern lecture and explained that if I left the Army in less than five years I should report back to his office.

Free at last! I headed back to Fort Dix, New Jersey, only to get another load of bricks on my head. At Fort Dix they looked at my papers and sent me back to the stockade to serve out my six months' sentence for going AWOL!

At this point I had only one thought in my head. I wanted to get into the war or bust. Again I started my campaign to get on an overseas shipment. I pestered the command until finally, when four months of my time was completed, I was released. Soon I was on my way across the Atlantic aboard the *Mauritania*.

We were piled six high in the hold, and I was lucky enough to get the top berth. That way I missed the shower of vomit those on the lower berths often received.

Not that I really would have cared. I was thrilled to be on my way, and didn't waste any time. I was out to get as much excitement and as much profit as possible out of the war effort. I had developed one talent during my confinement that now came in handy. I had become quite adept at gambling, and the days and nights of our crossing were spent in this worthwhile endeavor. I accumulated a nice little pile of money, and the only thing that reminded me of the circumstances of our voyage was a brief encounter with a German sub that tried to hit us and missed.

In England we were put on trains that took us to the English Channel. There we boarded small boats and moved out into the choppy waters of the channel. It rained cats and dogs, and on the French side we had to jump into waist-high water and wade ashore.

On the beach we stood dripping wet in line waiting for cold C-rations. Then we rushed again for a train headed east. Without stopping, we crossed France and were transferred to trucks taking us into Belgium. We got there just in time for the Battle of the Bulge with the 82nd Airborne Division.

On my first day in combat, the Commanding Officer saw my record as a Demolition Expert and put me to work making small bombs out of a pile of plastic explosives. The pile was about three feet high, and I pulled up a log and went to work. Another soldier joined me, and I learned that he had been with the unit for many months. While he was telling me about his experiences with the 82nd Airborne, I looked across a field at incoming artillery exploding. The explosions came closer and closer to our position. Out of the corner of my eye I kept watching the other soldier, wondering when he'd give the signal to dive for cover. He had all the experience, and I was just a green replacement; I wasn't going to chicken out.

The explosions came nearer, and my fear mounted. If one of those rounds landed near us ... the pile of bombs would make one giant crater.

The other fellow sat there paying no attention to the artillery. I wanted desperately to dive for cover, but I wasn't about to show myself a coward. At last the explosions were on the other side of us. They had missed!

Two days later I discovered why the other soldier had played it so cool. The two of us were walking through a forest known to be heavily mined. I carefully examined the trail for any signs of booby traps, but the other fellow was paying no attention to where he was walking. I finally said: "Why aren't you watching for mines?"

"I hope I step on one," he said. "I'm sick and tired of this rotten mess. I want to die."

From that day I kept as much distance as possible between the two of us!

Combat with the 82nd Airborne provided ample excitement. But some of the ugly experiences made further harsh impressions in my angry mind.

At the close of the war I went with the 508th Airborne Regiment to Frankfurt, Germany, where I was selected to serve as guard for General of the Army, Dwight D. Eisenhower. This was a proud moment in my life. I, Merlin

Carothers, a personal guard for a five-star General!

I would have liked to see more action, but the spoils of war weren't so bad either. We lived in plush apartment buildings that had belonged to top German officials. The previous occupants must have had no more than five minutes' notice before they departed. We found family picture albums, weapons, and even jewels. My off-duty time was spent in searching for "treasure."

In Frankfurt I had plenty of free time. My idea of a good time usually involved a considerable amount of drinking. I often drank myself into a state of oblivion and other soldiers told me what pranks I had pulled in town the night before.

I discovered that black marketeering was a quicker and more reliable source of income than gambling. I bought cigarettes from other soldiers for ten dollars a carton. With a suitcase full, I went to the black-market area in town where I could sell the cartons for one hundred dollars apiece. The black-market area was a frequent site of robberies, beatings, and murder, but I didn't care. I kept one hand on a loaded, cocked .45 in my pocket.

Soon I had a suitcase full of ten dollar bills in military money known as scrip. The only problem was to find a way to get the money back to the United States. Tight control limited each soldier to sending home only the amount he was paid by the Army. I stayed awake nights trying to figure a way to beat the system.

At the post office I watched the men line up to convert their monthly pay into money orders. Each man had to have his finance card, which listed the exact amount he had been paid. I observed one man with a pile of finance cards, a bag of money, and an armed guard. He was company clerk and was getting money orders for his entire company. I suddenly realized that all I needed was a pile of finance cards!

I located the unit finance clerk and soon learned that he would be willing to provide me with the finance cards for five dollars apiece. I was in business.

I set myself up as the company clerk of my own private company. With the money and the finance cards I went to the post office and had the money orders made out without a hitch!

With this setup I now found new ways to accumulate money. I learned that men coming from Berlin would give \$1,000 in scrip for a \$100 money order. I gladly obliged and then converted the \$900 into my own money order. I was on my way to becoming very rich!

Then came exciting news. My time to return to the U.S. had arrived! I packed my suitcase full of \$100 money orders and headed for the glorious shores of home.

At Fort Dix, N.J., they tried to get all of us to sign up for the Army Reserves. The Sergeant giving the pitch said, "Everyone who wants to sign up for the Reserves step up here, sign, and I'll give you your discharge. If you don't sign up now you will have to stay and hear a one-hour lecture on why you *should* sign up."

One hour longer in the Army? No way, I thought. I stepped forward and signed their paper. That split-second decision affected the rest of my life.

I received the long-coveted paper stating I was now a civilian. Free! I had no desire to ever see the inside of an Army post again. I had plenty of money, and life ahead looked rosy.

There was a problem of converting my suitcase full of money orders into crisp, green bills. I couldn't very well walk into the post office in my hometown, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, and dump the whole stack on the counter. Finally I thought of a solution. One by one I began to send the money orders to a post office in New York. Soon the money began filtering back.

My experiences with the law so far had taught me that I had better get into a profession where I would be able to operate safely within every available loophole. I had always wanted to become a lawyer, so I began the necessary steps to enroll in law school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

## Set Free

Grandmother was a sweet old lady, and I thought a great deal of Grandfather, but going to visit them was still an ordeal I avoided whenever possible. They made me nervous. Grandmother always found an opportunity to talk about God.

"I'm doing fine," I'd say. "Don't worry about me."

But she would insist: "You need to give your life to Jesus, Merlin."

It bugged me more than I wanted to admit. I hated to hurt Grandmother's feelings, but I didn't have time for any of that religious stuff. I'd just begun to live!

One Sunday evening shortly after I'd come back from Germany, I went to see Grandmother and Grandfather. I quickly realized I'd made a mistake. They were getting ready to go to church.

"Come with us, Merlin," Grandmother said. "We haven't seen you for so long; we'd love to have you come."

I squirmed in my chair. How could I tactfully get out of this one?

"I'd like to," I said finally. "But some friends have already asked if they could come pick me up."

Grandmother looked disappointed, and as soon as I could get to the phone I began calling everyone I knew. To my dismay I couldn't find anyone who was free to come pick me up.

It was getting close to church time, and I couldn't say to my grandparents: "I just don't want to go."

At the zero hour I had no choice. Off we went together.

The church service was held in a barn, but everyone there seemed to be happy. *Poor people*, I thought, *they don't*

*know anything about real life out there in the world, or they wouldn't waste an evening in a barn.*

The singing began and I picked up a hymn book to follow the words. At least I had to look as if I was with it. Suddenly I heard a deep voice speak directly in my ear.

"What--what did you say?" I whirled around to find no one behind me.

There was the voice again: "Tonight you must make a decision for Me. If you don't, it will be too late."

I shook my head and said automatically: "Why?"

"It just will be!"

Was I losing my marbles? But the voice was real. It was God, and He knew me! In a flash I suddenly saw it. Why hadn't I seen it before? God was real; He was the answer. In Him was everything I had ever searched for.

"Yes, God," I heard myself mutter. "I'll do it; whatever You want."

The service went on, but I was in another world. This was crazy, but I knew God!

Grandfather was deep in thought beside me. I didn't know it then, but he told me about it later. He was carrying on his own battle with God. For years he'd been smoking and chewing tobacco. Forty years of addiction to the weed had him hooked. Many a time he'd tried to quit, but had been seized with violent headaches and soon was back to chewing and smoking heavier than before.

Now he was sitting next to me in the meeting making his own commitment. "God, if You'll change Merlin, I'll give up my chewing and smoking even if it kills me."

No wonder Grandfather nearly collapsed when I went forward at the end of the meeting to make public the decision I'd made during the singing!

Years later I was at his bedside when his time came to die. He looked up at me and smiled. "Merlin," he said, "I kept my promise to God."

That Sunday night I couldn't wait to get home and read the Bible. I wanted to know God, and I read hungrily page after page. I had a wonderful feeling of excitement inside. It was even better than jumping out of an airplane with a parachute. That night God had reached down inside me, and I was changed into a new being. I felt as if I was standing on the threshold of exciting adventures the likes of which I couldn't even begin to imagine. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was still alive; the God who parted the Red Sea and spoke through a burning bush and sent His Son to die on a cross--He was my Father too!

I could suddenly understand what my earthly father had tried to tell me. When he was thirty-six years old he was confined to a bed for the first time in his life. Three days later his heart stopped. The doctor was there with an injection, and my father's heart began beating again. He opened his eyes and said: "That won't be necessary, Doctor. I am going to leave now." He raised himself up in bed and looked around the room with a radiant glow on his face.

"Look!" he said. "They are here to take me!" With that he lay back and was gone.

My father had known Jesus as his personal friend and Savior. He had been ready to go.

Now I felt ready too, but even as I voiced the thought to myself, I became aware of an uneasiness, a gnawing at the back of my mind. What was wrong? Show me, God!

Gradually the thought became clearer. The money! All that money. It wasn't mine; I had to give it back!

The decision made, I breathed a sigh of relief. I couldn't wait to get rid of that money. It was like a sickness inside me, and I knew that feeling would be there until the money was gone.

I told the post office, but they said it wasn't any concern of theirs because I hadn't stolen the money orders. I could do with them as I liked.

I still had a whole bunch that I hadn't cashed in yet, so I took the suitcase into the bathroom and began to flush piles of one hundred dollar money orders down the toilet. With each flush I felt a mounting flood of joy inside.

That still left me with the money I had already cashed. I wrote the U.S. Treasury Department and told them how I had acquired the money. They wrote back asking if I had any evidence of how I had gotten the money and the money orders. It was too late; the evidence was flushed down the drain! I told them I had no proof, just the money, and they advised me that all they could do was to accept the money into the Conscience Fund.

Once again I was a poor man, but I would gladly have given away everything I owned for that new life and joy I felt within.

There was one more shadow of the past to be encountered. I returned to Pittsburgh and reported to the district attorney. There were three years remaining on my sentence, and I would now have to be on parole for these years. This meant regular reporting and supervision by a parole officer.

The district attorney received me and asked a clerk to get my records. He glanced at them and looked surprised.

"Do you know what you have received?" I knew I'd received Jesus, but that could hardly have gotten into my record already.

"No, sir."

"You have received a presidential pardon, signed by President Truman!"

"A pardon?"

"That means your record is completely clear. Just as if you had never gotten involved with the law."

I wanted to shout for joy. "Why did I get it?" The district attorney smiled. "It has something to do with your excellent combat record."

He explained that I was free to go and do anything I wanted to; my case was closed.

"Thank You, Lord." I was overwhelmed. Not only were my sins washed away and the case closed at Calvary, but God had given me a clean start in the eyes of the United States government as well.

But what was I going to do? My motives for becoming a lawyer had been questionable. It seemed clear that God did not want me in that profession. Soon the thought became very persistent. I was to become a minister! Me, in the pulpit? The thought seemed preposterous. "You know me, Lord," I argued. "I like excitement, adventure, even danger. I wouldn't make a very good preacher."

But it seemed that God had His plans for me all set. I couldn't sleep nights, and the longer I thought and prayed, the more exciting the whole idea became. If God could make a preacher out of an ex-jailbird, paratrooper, gambler, and black-marketeer, that would be a greater adventure into the unknown than anything I'd ever tried before.

I enrolled in Marion College, a church-related school in Marion, Indiana, and I must have been the most excited student on campus.

To supplement my income from the GI bill, I worked six hours a day in a foundry. I wanted to get through school as fast as possible so I got special permission to take twenty-one hours rather than the maximum seventeen hours allowed per semester.

I worked from 2:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., studied until 12:00 p.m., slept until 4:00 a.m., and then studied until 8:00 a.m. when it was time to go to school.

One Sunday I got my first chance to preach in the local jail. I held onto the bars and begged the men to give their lives to Jesus. Every week prisoners knelt, holding on to the bars from the other side, and wept their way to faith in Jesus.

I went back to school floating on a cloud.

Saturday nights were free, and I got a group of students together to hold outdoor services on the courthouse steps in the center of Marion. To our delight, people came forward to accept Jesus. After the service we walked up and down the streets, urging anyone who would listen to let Jesus come into their lives.

I had never been so busy, yet I felt as if I couldn't work hard enough for Jesus. He had saved my life; the least I could do was give Him my time.

I finished the four-year course in two-and-a-half years and enrolled at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. God provided me with a Methodist circuit of four churches where I served as student pastor. Every week I drove the round trip of two hundred miles to serve my churches.

For this each of them gave me five dollars a week and I was able to eat bountifully each weekend.

By squeezing everything I could into the schedule, I completed the three-year seminary in two years. At last I had made it to my goal. I was a minister! I had worked so long and so hard that I didn't quite know how to stop. But this was it; this was what God had called me to do. I was sent to the Methodist church in Claypool, Indiana, for my first full-time assignment. I threw myself into the work with all the zeal I could muster, and slowly the three churches in the circuit began to grow. The offerings increased, the attendance grew and my salary went up.

Young people accepted Jesus in growing numbers, and my flock accepted and loved me and put up with the blunders of a young minister.

Still I felt a growing restlessness within me. There was a void, an emptiness, almost a boredom. Increasingly, my thoughts were drawn toward the Army chaplaincy. I knew the soldier, his thoughts and his temptations. Did God want me to serve the men in uniform? I prayed about it. "I'll go if You want me to go, Lord; I'll stay if You want me to stay...."

Gradually the pull toward the Army got stronger. In 1953 I volunteered for the chaplaincy and was accepted. It couldn't have happened if I hadn't received that presidential pardon. God had known and blessed me in this special way.

After three months at chaplains' school, I was sent to join the airborne troopers at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

## The Search

It's exciting to be a chaplain, and it was excitement I'd been looking for. I went everywhere with the men. In the air, on the ground, climbing mountains, going on marches, undergoing physical conditioning. In the billets, offices, on the field, or in the mess hall--everywhere I had opportunities to tell men what God wanted to do for them.

At Fort Campbell I had the opportunity to become a pilot, something I'd always wanted. With a friend I bought an old airplane held together mainly by chewing gum and rubber bands, it seemed. The plane had no radio equipment and we had to fly by sight or instinct. Once I got completely lost and suddenly found myself escorted by two Army planes. They motioned for me to land, and I found I'd been flying over Fort Knox, Kentucky. The angry security police informed me I was lucky not to have been shot down.

Our flying came to an abrupt end when my partner crash-landed the plane in a cornfield.

While stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I went with the 82nd Airborne Division to the Dominican Republic. This was a small police action, but thirty-nine paratroopers were lost.

Back at Fort Bragg, I continued parachuting and finally received the coveted Army award of Master Parachutist.

From outward appearances all was well. My life was full and exciting and I was doing God's work. Maybe that was part of the problem. I was doing God's work. I didn't like to admit it, but I often became too tense when I talked to the men about God's love for them. Converting them was my business and I struggled hard.

I was always aware that I was falling woefully short of the perfection I longed for. Somehow it was always just beyond the horizon.

I read books about the deeper life of prayer, and went to camp meetings to hear others preach about the power of God.

I didn't see much of that power in my own life, and I desperately longed for it. I wanted to be used of God, and everywhere I looked were people in need. I just didn't have what it took to meet their needs.

About this time I went to Korea and there, in an accident, my glasses shattered into my right eye. Sixty percent of the vision in that eye was gone. The cornea was scarred, and the doctors said vision would never return.

Now, where was the power of God? Jesus had walked the earth and healed the blind. He said that greater things even than He had done, those who followed after Him would do.

I went to Seoul twice for eye operations. The verdict was negative. I prayed. Everything in me rebelled against accepting a God of salvation, a God who is omnipotent creator, a God whose name I preach to men who face death on the battlefield, as a God without the power to heal. But where was the key? How was that power released through men? I had to know.

On my third flight to Seoul for a visit to the surgeon, I was sitting in the airplane when suddenly there was a strong sensation within me. It wasn't an audible voice, but something definitely communicated, saying: "Your eyes are going to be all right."

I knew God had spoken. He had spoken to me, just as clearly as He did that Sunday evening in the barn back in Pennsylvania.

The surgeon in Seoul shook his head and said: "Sorry, Chaplain, there's nothing we can do for your eye." Instead of feeling discouragement, I was elated. God had spoken; I trusted Him.

A few months later I had a sudden urge to go back to the doctor to check on my eye. After the examination he looked astonished. I don't understand," he said. "Your eye is perfectly well."

God had done it! I was thrilled and more determined than ever to research every avenue of contact with His power. I returned to the United States in 1963 and was assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1964.

## Be Filled

For some time I went to a small weekly prayer group near Fort Bragg. One evening, Ruth, a member of the group, was visibly moved during a prayer session. I had watched her during several meetings and often thought I would like to ask her how she had come to experience such obvious joy in her life. Unlike some of the rest of us, she seemed to be filled continuously with a joy I certainly had felt only on rare occasions in my life.

This particular evening Ruth confided in me: "I was so blessed I almost prayed out loud in tongues!"

"You almost what?" I was horrified.

"Prayed in tongues," Ruth said brightly.

I lowered my voice and looked around to see if we were being watched. "Ruth, whatever has come over you?"

Ruth laughed heartily. "I've been praying in tongues ever since I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit."

"What is that?" I'd never heard the term before.

Ruth patiently explained that it was the same experience that the disciples had at Pentecost. "I experienced my own Pentecost." She smiled with unmistakable radiance.

"I thought you were Baptist." I felt shaken.

"I am, but God is moving in all denominations."

I had heard rumors of a wave of emotionalism invading the churches. I had heard some tales about Pentecostals being "drunk in the spirit," whatever that meant, and having wild orgies. I knew Ruth needed help badly.

I put my hand on her arm. "Be careful, Ruth," I said earnestly. "You're playing with dangerous stuff. I'll be praying for you, and if you need help, call me."

Ruth smiled and patted my hand. "Thank you, Merlin. I appreciate your concern."

Some time later she called me.

"Merlin, a group called Camp Farthest Out is having a retreat at Morehead City. We'd like you to go." It sounded like something I'd better stay away from. I tactfully replied that I would go if I could, which meant that I wouldn't be able to.

Within the next week several others called. A businessman reminded me that I would need my golf clubs. A lady from Raleigh telephoned to tell me that she had arranged for all my expenses to be paid if I would go. Someone else called to say I could bring another minister free of charge. This was too much. How could I resist all this genuine interest in my spiritual well-being? I said, "Thank you, I'll go."

I got in touch with a Presbyterian minister friend and invited him to come along. He hedged.

"It's an all-expenses-paid trip at a resort hotel!"

"I'll go."

On the way Dick said: "Merlin, why are we going to this thing?"

"I don't know," I said. "But it's free, so let's enjoy it."

In the hotel lobby we were greeted with such warm enthusiasm from people we'd never seen that I was beginning



to wonder what kind of strange beings we had fallen amongst.

The services were unlike anything we'd ever attended. People sang with uninhibited joy, clapped their hands, and actually raised their arms while they were singing.

Both Dick and I felt very much out of place, but agreed there was a joy here from which we could learn something.

One very cultured and refined-looking lady kept coming up to us and saying: "Has anything happened yet?"

"No, ma'am, what do you mean?" we'd answer.

"You'll see," she always said.

Ruth and some of the others who had invited us urged me to have a private talk with a certain lady who they said had unusual power.

They took us to meet her, and we sat patiently as she told us what God had done in her life and in the lives of others that she knew. She made numerous references to the "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," and went through the Scriptures to show that the experience had been a common one for Christians in the first century.

"The Holy Spirit is still doing the same thing in many people's lives today," she said. "Jesus still baptizes those who believe in Him, just as He did at Pentecost."

I felt a twinge of excitement. Could it be that I could experience my own Pentecost? Could I see tongues of fire, hear the rush of wind, and speak in an unknown tongue?

She had finished talking and sat looking at us.

"I'd like to pray for you," she said softly. "That you might receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit."

Without hesitating I said, "Yes."

She placed her hands on my head and began to pray softly. I waited for "it" to hit me. Nothing happened. I didn't feel a thing.

She went on and placed her hands on Dick's head. When she had finished praying I looked at him and he looked at me. I could tell he hadn't felt anything either. This whole thing was a fake.

The lady looked at us both with a hint of a smile.

"You haven't felt anything yet, have you?" We shook our heads. "No, ma'am."

"I'm going to pray for you in a language you will not understand. As I pray you will receive a new language of your own."

Again she placed her hands on my head. I felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing. When she was through praying, she asked if I could hear or sense any words within me that I didn't understand. I thought for a minute and realized that there were in my mind words that didn't mean anything to me. I felt certain that these strange words were strictly a product of my own imagination, and I told her so.

"If you said them out loud, would you feel as if you were being made a fool of?" she asked. "I certainly would."

"Would you be willing to be a fool for Christ's sake?" This put the whole situation in a different perspective. Of course I'd do anything for Jesus, but speaking out loud such utter nonsense could mean disaster for my future. I could imagine all those people going around telling everyone that a Methodist chaplain had been praying in an unknown tongue. I might even have to leave the Army! Still, what if this was what Jesus wanted me to do? Suddenly even my Army career seemed less important. Haltingly I began to speak out loud the words that were forming in my mind.

Still I felt nothing different. I did believe that Jesus had given me a new tongue as a sign that He had baptized me in the Holy Spirit, yet the disciples at Pentecost had acted like drunk men. Obviously they had been overwhelmed by some feeling.

I watched Dick; his experience seemed to be the same as mine. He spoke words of an unknown language and believed in the validity of it, yet displayed no emotional reaction.

"Your experience is based on faith in a fact, not on feeling," said the lady, apparently reading our minds.

I sat in deep thought. I didn't *feel* any different, but *was* I different? I looked up; an amazing realization had just hit me.

"I once again *know* that Jesus Christ is alive!" I said. "I don't just believe, I KNOW!"

Why, of course! The Holy Spirit brings witness of Jesus Christ, says the Bible. Now I knew that to be a fact. That was the source of the new authority of the disciples after Pentecost. They didn't remember a man who had lived and died and risen again. They *knew* Him in the present tense because He had filled them with His Holy Spirit, whose primary purpose is to witness about Jesus!

Even as I saw the magnitude of my sin, I also saw Jesus in all His splendor as my redeemer. I saw Him for what I'd always known deep in my heart that He was. All of my recent nagging doubts were swept away by a wave of joyous certainty. It was glorious! Never again could I doubt that Jesus was who He said He was. Never again could I commit the folly of thinking that He had been a mere man, a good man, an example for us to follow.

What a marvelous truth: Jesus living in us; His power operating through us. He is the vine. His life pulsates through our beings.

We are nothing apart from Him, can do nothing in our own power.

"Thank You, Jesus!" I stood up, and as I reached my full height, something hit me! I was suddenly filled and overflowing with a feeling of warmth and love for everybody in the room.

It must have hit Dick at the same time. I saw the tears well up in his eyes, and without a word we reached out and gave each other a bear hug, laughing and crying at the same time.

We went downstairs for lunch, and I felt an overwhelming love for everyone I saw. I had never known anything like it.

That evening Dick and I began to pray in one of the rooms. People came in to join us and soon the room was full. As we prayed, others were filled with the Holy Spirit. The hotel rang with shouts of joy as people experienced the fullness of Christ's presence.

At 2:00 a.m. Dick and I tried to go to sleep. It was no use; we were too excited.

I said: "Dick, let's get up and pray some more." We prayed another two hours for everyone we knew, and then praised God for His goodness to us.

## His Power Within You

I returned to Fort Bragg anxious to share with everyone the wonderful thing that had happened to me. The first day I went to our headquarters company orderly room. The First Sergeant was sitting behind his desk. He was big and rough and well known for his gruff manners.

"First Sergeant," I said, "did I ever tell you that Jesus loves you?"

To my amazement the tears began to roll down his cheeks.

He said: "No, Chaplain, you never told me anything like that."

I felt my face flush hot with shame. For over a year I had seen him several times a day and I had never told him anything about Jesus.

I walked into the hallway and met the Supply Sergeant.

"Sergeant, did I ever tell you that Jesus loves you and I love you too?"

"No, Sir, you never told me anything like that." Again I felt ashamed, and he said: "Sir, do you have a minute to talk?" We went to my office and he poured out a host of problems I had never known he had. When he was through I asked if he would like to accept Jesus as his Savior. He said he would, and knelt with tears streaming down his face.

Everywhere I went, men accepted Jesus. It seemed that there was a power in me that was doing the talking for me. When I started to speak to someone, I had no idea what I was going to say, but whatever came had a new power that drew men to Jesus.

It was easy to serve God this way. The old tension was gone, and I could laugh. Preaching was no longer something to labor over. It became pure joy just to let His thoughts pour through me.

All Army personnel must attend a character guidance class once a month. Teaching this class as chaplains, we are not allowed to preach. As carefully as I could, I one day told the class that the God of our country is still alive and daily answers prayers. After the class a Private came up to me, and with his nose six inches from mine, rather insolently said: "You really believe all that stuff, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," I said.

"Do you mean that if you prayed now, God would answer?"

"Yes," I said, "I know He will."

"Do you think it is wrong to smoke? I've been smoking since I was fourteen," the Private said. "Now I smoke three packs a day, and the doctor told me this morning that if I don't stop, it will kill me."

I said: "There's no question about it; for you it is wrong to smoke."

"Then you ask your God to make me quit!"

How could I pray like that? The obvious pat answers were swirling through my head: God helps those who help themselves, or he could pray that God would help him want to quit. But that wasn't what he'd asked me.

"God," I prayed silently, "help me know what to do."

Immediately I felt a strong impression: "Pray in your new language!"

"Out loud?"

"No, just silently."

I began to pray in the language I had received at the retreat. Then I paused.

There came another impression: "Put your hand on his shoulder and pray."

I obediently put my hand on his shoulder. "Pray what?"

"Silently pray in your new language." I did. Then came the impression again: "Translate it into English."

Without thinking, I opened my mouth and out came the words: "God, don't let him smoke again as long as he lives."

What a prayer! If the man ever smoked again he'd be convinced that God didn't answer prayer. I felt utterly confused, and just turned on my heels and left.

In the days that followed, I asked God repeatedly if I had misunderstood. Would my mistake make that man disbelieve? Again and again came the impression: "Just trust Me."

Trusting God apparently meant going out on a limb without anything to hold onto but faith. With new eagerness I dove into an intensive study of God's Word. If I was going to operate on faith, it would have to be faith in the integrity and very nature of God. I had to know Him, and I found that the more I read, the stronger I believed. Bible reading had never been this exciting before. From the pages rose a new knowledge of God the omnipotent who promised that we could do all things in Christ and who said that the power within us is the same power that raised Christ from the dead!

In Ephesians 3:20-21 Paul wrote: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or



think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Carefully, I studied Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth. He listed the various ways the Holy Spirit was known to operate through men: There were speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles, prophesying, preaching, wisdom, knowledge, faith, discernment.

How could I know what "gifts" God wanted to express through me? Had He given me any special gifts?

Again the verse from Ephesians came back to me: "According to the power that worketh in us." I didn't have any gifts. All I could do was to be willing to let God operate through me.

In other words, my job was strictly that of being obedient to the impressions or urgings I felt within me. The Scripture says that He could do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Obviously, there was no way I could anticipate or know what God wanted to do.

One evening in our prayer group, I talked about God's power to heal our bodies. One lady spoke up. "Why don't you ask God to heal one of us then?"

I felt a bit shaky. Of course I knew God could and would hear prayer for the sick. But would He hear and answer *me*?

"Okay," I said, with a sudden release of faith. "Who wants to be prayed for?"

"I do," said the same lady. "One of my eyes has been weeping tears for several months. Medication hasn't helped. Please pray about it."

I held my breath, placed my hands on her head, and prayed, mustering all my faith to believe that God was healing her right then. When I was through, her eye was still weeping. Had I done something wrong? Again came the prompting within. "Trust Me." All right, faith means believing something you don't see. All the stories I'd read in the Bible had made it very plain; the difference between victory and defeat was always a matter of faith. God couldn't do a thing when the Israelites refused to believe. The promises in the Bible are plentiful to those who will only believe.

"Thank You, Lord," I said out loud, "for hearing our prayer."

That night the lady called me, "Chaplain, guess what happened?" Her voice was bubbling with excitement.

"Tell me!"

"I was sitting here reading when I suddenly realized that something had happened to my eye. It is completely healed!"

I was thrilled. "Thank You, Lord," I said, "I get Your point. I'll do the trusting; You'll do the rest."

A local Presbyterian minister who had been filled with the Holy Spirit had been reluctant to tell his congregation. He invited a member of our prayer group to give her testimony during a Sunday evening service, and several of us in the group came along to be a support in prayer.

As she told how she, a Southern Baptist, had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, there was dead silence in the church. It was evident that God was speaking to the people. At the close of the service the pastor called on me to pronounce the benediction. I stood up, but instead of giving the benediction, I began to speak the very first words that came into my mind: "Everyone who wants to come to the altar and surrender his life to God, please come forward."

Dead silence! There had never been an altar call in the history of that church. Then one by one, people began to come forward, falling on their knees.

I walked over to the first one. I didn't know what to pray. I didn't know why he had come forward. I bowed my head. Within me I prayed silently: "Show me how to pray, God." I heard "Pray in the Spirit." I silently prayed in my new language.

"Now begin to translate what you have said."

"Lord, forgive this man for his drunkenness, his dishonesty in business." I was shocked at my own words. What if I had misunderstood? I could really mess things up for my minister friend.

I walked over to the next person and followed the same procedure. "Lord, forgive this man for his vile temper, his ugly disposition, and his selfish treatment of his family."

I went from one to another, and with my hands on the person's head prayed as I was prompted to pray, prayers of repentance and confession.

By the time I was through I knew I had really crawled way out on a limb in complete trust.

After the benediction the people came to me one by one. With tears of joy they said: "You prayed for exactly what I needed, but how did you know my problem?"

Days later the minister told me that the congregation had been revolutionized. Many of the people who had come forward that night were elders and officers in the church. Now the entire congregation was overflowing with enthusiasm, zeal, and joy.

I felt like shouting. I hadn't known the problems that beset the men and women of that church, but God had. He knows the heart and mind of each of us, and can speak through us in a power that will directly minister to the exact needs of every individual. If people respond, it isn't our doing, but His. If they refuse, again we do not get blamed for a failure.

Every day and wherever I went, it was the same; people responding to Jesus. Whenever I fell back into the habit of trying to think beforehand what I would say to someone, the results were immediate. I became tense; the power and presence of God simply didn't flow. The principle of letting go and letting God was valid. All I had to do was relax in the

presence of God, letting my mind go blank and opening my mouth in faith to speak whatever God impressed on me. Always the words spoke directly to a need, always the person was wonderfully helped.

I marveled. I had been a pastor for many years and worked hard at it, yet I had never seen so much happen in the lives of so many in the short time since Jesus invaded my being in the fullness of His Spirit.

Without the pressures of having to preplan and organize and research and write sermon notes, I found that I had much more time to spend in Bible reading and prayer. It seemed as if I suddenly had more energy than ever before, and I never had the frustrating experience of wasting time on projects that turned out to be ineffective.

As long as I rested in Jesus, it seemed that God took my days, and every detail, every appointment, every happening began to fall into place in a perfect whole. No longer did I experience confusion and conflicts of appointments or schedules.

My only regret was that I had not discovered this experience of yielding myself fully to God many years before.

About this time, Oral Roberts came to Fayetteville. A huge tent was set up, and night after night thousands came to hear him preach and pray for the sick. I went to see him and volunteered to do anything I could to help.

He was amazed that a Methodist chaplain would want to be involved. He had never been able to get anyone but Pentecostal ministers to assist before.

From the opening night, I was on the platform in uniform. I was there next to Oral Roberts as he prayed for the sick, and I saw physical changes take place as bodies were healed! What a tremendous joy!

My chaplain friends began to hint that if I continued appearing in such places and being associated with men like Oral Roberts, I might as well forget about ever "getting anyplace" in the Army chaplaincy. They were probably right, but I'd rather be obedient to God and see His power clearly demonstrated than be seeking the temporal approval of men.

The next week I was casually leafing through a list of chaplains who had been selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. I hadn't been a Major long enough to be considered, but there, on the list, was my name! Later I found that the Army has the authority to promote five percent of its officers before they are eligible under the ordinary rules.

All I could think was, "Thank You, Lord, for showing me that I can trust You to look after all my needs."

Obedience sometimes meant going against the expressed wishes of the people who came to ask for help.

A young Army Lieutenant brought his wife to see me. "She would like prayer for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," he said.

I had a most unusual feeling within. I just knew that this girl had already received this experience. She hadn't said a word since they entered my office, yet I knew this was so.

I said: "You have already received the Baptism, so you don't need to be prayed for again."

"How do you know that?" She looked surprised. "I've tried to believe ever since I was prayed for."

"I know because the Holy Spirit tells me," I said. "He also says that before you stand up you will receive the evidence of speaking in a new tongue."

This was really way out, I thought. What if nothing happened? Her faith would surely be shaken. Yet within I felt a certainty. I invited both of them to join me in a prayer of thanksgiving for what God had already done.

Before I finished, I could hear her softly praying in her new language. She was so filled with joy that she nearly floated out of the office.

One day a young Private showed up in my office. I remembered the prayer I'd prayed for him: "God, don't let him ever smoke again." He was beaming.

"Sir," he burst out, "You'll never believe what happened to me after you left."

I'd seen enough amazing happenings in the last month to believe anything.

"Yes, I'll believe," I said. "Tell me."

"When you turned and left, I laughed and thought, *This will be easy. All I have to do is smoke, and I'll prove that God doesn't answer prayer.* I went into the latrine and lit up a cigarette, took a big drag, and immediately started to vomit. I figured that was a coincidence, probably something I ate, and later that afternoon I tried smoking again. The same thing happened. For the next three days, every time I tried to smoke I vomited. Now, if I just think about smoking I feel like vomiting."

I was overjoyed. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be with us to guide us into all truth. I hadn't misunderstood His instructions.

A few days later the Private came back.

"Sir, would you pray one more prayer for me?"

"I sure will!"

"Please pray that God will forgive my sins and help me to accept Jesus as my Savior."

Within minutes we were on our knees together and he joyfully accepted the Lord.

Months later I told about this incident in the First Baptist Church of Columbus, Georgia. After the service a man came up to me and said: "I was in Admin Company of the 82nd Airborne Division when that happened. That man was going all over the company telling about the chaplain who had fixed him so he couldn't smoke!"

Not only does God save, He means business when He says He can remold us and make us into His image. He can literally take away our old habits and renew us from within!

I had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit only a couple of months ago, yet it seemed I'd already lived a lifetime in this new dimension.

Now I was in for an encounter with the enemy in force. I was suddenly the victim of an unusual affliction. All my life I'd been strong as a horse and in top physical condition. Now every time I exerted myself in the least, my heart began to beat rapidly. I was weak and ached all over. Reluctantly I went to bed for a week. My condition didn't improve at all. I went to the hospital to see what the medical verdict would be, and they immediately slapped me on a stretcher and hustled me off to bed. Test after test gave no clue to what ailed me. I felt wretched, weak, and in pain, and it seemed to get worse instead of better. At this rate I'd just as soon be dead. All my energies seemed depleted, and the outlook was bleak.

Then suddenly one night when I wondered if the end might be near, there was the strong impression: "Do you still trust Me?"

"Yes, Lord." I whispered it into the darkened room. A quiet peace began to move through me, and I fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning I felt much better. The doctors insisted I stay in bed for a while, and I was grateful for days of prayer, praise, and study.

One day I was reading and I suddenly felt the voice within me ask: "Will you now live like Jesus?"

I could only answer: "Yes, Lord."

Back home from the hospital, I went to our prayer group and felt a strong impression to ask them to pray for me. I had always been the one to pray for others. Now I sat in the chair in the center of the group, and they prepared to pray for me. "What do you want us to ask God to do?"

I thought for a moment. "Ask God to use me more than ever," I said. They began to pray, and suddenly, in the Spirit, I saw Jesus kneeling before me. He was holding my feet and resting His head on my knees. He said: "I don't want to use you. I want you to use Me!"

It was as if a door had opened into a new understanding of Jesus. He told the disciples that they had to permit Him to kneel before them while He washed their feet. He wants to give Himself for us each moment of our lives just as completely as He gave Himself on the cross.

## Vietnam

In 1966 I received orders to go to Vietnam with the 80th General Support Group, then stationed at Fort Bragg.

We boarded ship in San Francisco, and as we left the bay moving out to sea, I stood at the railing feeling the peace of God within me and around me. This was His will for me, I knew.

On board I immediately started a prayer group, a Bible study, and regular worship services. We spent twenty-one days at sea and each day several men accepted Jesus.

The Devil would frequently whisper in my ear that they were just doing it because they were going to Vietnam and their decisions weren't really honest.

Months later I had proof of how much of a liar the Devil is. Many of the men who made decisions for Jesus were with a unit that left us as soon as we reached Vietnam. One day I walked into their unit, and one of the Sergeants saw me. He almost exploded with joy. "Praise the Lord, Chaplain Carothers."

He told me of all the things God had been doing. Together we went to see others in the unit who had accepted Jesus aboard ship, and they told me about the Bible classes they were holding and of the men they had led to the Lord.

"Do you remember Lieutenant Stover?" they asked.

"Yes, I do." I remembered the afternoon he stood on deck and told me how he had been running from God all through college. He had given his life back to Jesus right there and told me that as soon as he got out of the Army he would answer the call to full-time ministry.

"He has started a tremendous choir and the men really enjoy singing with him."

They took me to meet the Lieutenant and we had a joyful reunion.

As soon as I arrived in Cam Rahn Bay I organized a Saturday night prayer group. Soon there were twenty-five men meeting each week. I began by challenging them to believe that God would answer our prayers if we would just believe Him.

For several weeks I asked for specific prayer requests. Finally one evening a Warrant Officer spoke up.

"Well, Sir, I sure would be pleased for you to pray for my wife. We have been married six years and she is so against religion that she won't even let us have prayer at the table. I don't think it will do much good to pray for her, but I'd be glad for you to try."

I thought this was an unusual request to start with, but I was learning that God knows His business. I asked the men to hold hands in a circle, and we began praying for our first miracle.

None of the men had ever tried believing for a miracle, but they were willing to try. I had been sharing with them all the wonderful things God had been doing in my life since I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Two weeks later the Warrant Officer came to the prayer group with a letter in his hand. Tears flowed down his face as he read the letter to us:

"Darling, you will probably find it difficult to believe what has been happening here at home. One week ago I was standing at our kitchen sink on a Saturday morning. I began to have a most unusual experience. A big white sign

began flashing through my mind. On it in big black letters was the word 'REVIVAL.' I couldn't get it out of my mind. No matter what I tried to think about, the sign stayed in front of me all morning long. By noon I was really upset. I called your sister and asked her if there was a big revival sign some place in town. I thought I might have seen it. She said there was no such sign, but they were having revival at their church. 'Would you like to come?' she asked me.

"I said, 'You know I never go to such things.' But the sign stayed with me and by evening it was so strong that I called your sister and asked if I could go with her. During the service an invitation was given and I went forward. I've waited a week to write you about this for I wanted to be sure that I really was giving my life to Jesus. But Darling, it is true! I was baptized today, and I am thrilled! I can't wait for you to come home so we can have a real Christian home."

"Chaplain," said the officer, "do you know what time it was here when it was Saturday morning at home?"

I shook my head.

"Saturday night when we prayed for her. That's when she began to see the sign. And do you remember Sunday morning?"

"Yes, I remember." He had come forward when the invitation had been given at the close of the morning worship service. I had said that I thought he already was a Christian and he answered: "Yes, I am, Sir, but I was standing back there and got the strongest feeling that if I came forward it would somehow help my wife."

Now he looked at me, tears flowing freely. "Chaplain, do you realize what time that was back home?"

Then it dawned on me. It had been Saturday night. The night his wife accepted Jesus. An electric thrill went through our prayer group. Tears rolled down many cheeks. The men were learning for themselves that God does answer prayer.

Sitting next to the Warrant Officer was a black Sergeant. I could see that he was deeply troubled. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"Sir, my wife is like his; she won't accept any kind of religion in our home. I've been realizing that if I had just a little faith two weeks ago we could have prayed for my wife too, and maybe the same thing would have happened to her."

"Let's pray for your wife right now," I said with enthusiasm.

"Sir, I believe I missed my chance. I just don't have faith to pray now."

"You don't need to depend on your faith alone," I said. "Just believe in our prayers, and we will have faith for you."

We joined hands and began to pray. There was a new fervor among the men. They had begun to see for themselves that God hears and God answers.

The next morning I was in my office when the Sergeant came bouncing in with a letter in his hand and a big smile.

"Don't tell me you got an answer already," I said jokingly.

"I sure did!"

He was nearly in orbit and suddenly the words flashed into my mind: "Before they call I will answer." Could it be?

"What does the letter say?"

It was nearly a duplication of the one we had heard the night before. The Sergeant's wife also had been saved, baptized, and was already teaching a Sunday School class.

"Oh, God," I breathed, "I love You, I love You, I love You!"

One Saturday night a new officer came to our meeting. He was obviously not in sympathy with our approach to prayer.

"Chaplain, if God is actually answering prayer, why doesn't He do something important?"

"What would you consider important?" I asked quietly.

"From the first day our little son was able to stand up, he would look at his feet and cry out in pain. We have taken him to every doctor and specialist in the area. We have had special shoes, casts, braces, wrappings, and nothing helps. He is seven years old now and every night my wife has to put his feet on a pillow and rub them before he can go to sleep. Why doesn't God do something for him?"

Under my breath I asked God to show me how to pray; then I said: "We will pray and God will heal him!" I felt very certain. "You don't believe, but we do, and God will heal him. Join the circle with us and let's pray."

The men prayed with renewed hunger to see God move. Here was a third request for someone back home. I knew God had sent it.

Two weeks later another letter arrived:

Dear:

I've waited for a week to tell you about something that is almost too good to be true. One week ago I noticed that for the first time in his life, Paul didn't mention his feet once during the day. He went to sleep that night without a pillow under his feet. I wanted to write to you right away, but was afraid of raising your hopes. The next day it was the same. It's been a whole week now, and he hasn't complained about his feet hurting!"

"Chaplain, it's hard for me to believe," said the officer, struggling to hold back the tears. "But the day my boy's feet stopped hurting is the day we prayed for him!"

For months afterward, every time I saw this officer, he would raise his arms and say, "His feet don't hurt yet!"

From then on our men began to grow in faith. More and more prayers were answered. Other men came to our group to hear about the amazing things that were going on. I began to read letters and reports of answered prayers

from the pulpit Sunday mornings, and daily men would wave to me and yell, "Any new miracles, Chaplain?"

Often I called back: "The greatest miracle of all; another man has accepted Jesus and received eternal life!"

One of our chaplains was a Southern Baptist. We were good friends and he loved the Lord, but he was scared to death of my emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The ideas of faith healing, casting out of demons and evil spirits, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and experiencing the gifts of the Spirit were completely strange to him. He came to one of our prayer groups and then asked to be excused from ever attending another.

He was particularly worried about the way one of us would sit in a chair in the middle of a circle while others would place their hands on him and pray that God would meet his particular needs. He had never seen this done before, and it seemed like something unchristian to him.

Through the men who kept coming to the group, he heard of things happening. Men who were discouraged, defeated, and ready to give up would ask to be prayed for. They told him how they had experienced total release from their burdens. After sitting in the chair and having others pray for them with the laying on of hands, they had been filled with a peace and joy that stayed with them. They told how Jesus had become more real to them from that moment on.

Little by little, these things were affecting the chaplain. He began to realize that God works in many ways, even in ways much different from what he had seen and experienced before. Then something unexpected happened.

A chaplain in another front line unit was killed. My friend was called to take his place immediately. He felt naturally a little apprehensive and came to my office to say goodbye. Hesitantly, he confessed that the ministry through our prayer group had come to mean a great deal to him. Then he knelt on the floor with tears flowing. He took my hands and placed them on his head.

"Merlin, please pray for me the way you pray."

Quietly I began to pray for him in tongues, and as I prayed he began to be filled with joy and peace. Laughing through tears he told me how all his fears were gone. He was ready to go up to the battle lines.

A few weeks later he called me to say that he had been nearly killed in a helicopter accident the first day he arrived in his unit.

"Even then I could only feel an overflowing love and trust in Jesus," he said.

My unit moved north to Chu Lai and joined the Americal Division. We were now in the very thick of the battle along with the Marines. More and more I saw evidences of God's power protecting His children. When we trust Him, no power on earth can touch us unless it is God's will.

On several occasions when I was scheduled to go to certain places I felt a last-minute urge to change my plans. Later I found that each time I obeyed such an urge, I had avoided an incident that could have gotten me killed.

After several months at Chu Lai I was transferred south to Quin Yahn to serve with the 85th Evacuation Hospital. Men who had been wounded only a few hours before were brought to us. Over and over I saw the power of God working. These men were ready to accept Jesus. Man after man told me how he had been saved from death by a power beyond his understanding.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I can't explain it," they would say. "All of a sudden, when I knew I was going to die, I became aware of a great power surrounding me. I was then sure I was safe. I knew it was God, and that He didn't want me to die."

Often the men asked me why God had chosen to save them. I told them that He had some special purpose for their lives and He would reveal it as they listened to His voice.

I went from bed to bed talking to the boys and was often overcome with emotion. They were torn, bleeding, and in some cases, dying. But I never heard anyone complain. They were confident that the job they had been doing was important, and that for some reason they were saved from death. I saw nurses turn away in tears as they saw the strength and courage of these men. No matter how great the pain, they would grin and say, "I'm fine."

One night a nurse called me to the hospital to see an Army Major. When he saw me he began to weep. He was covered with bandages, and for ten minutes I stood there while he tried to stop the flow of tears. I wondered what the problem was. Had he been told that his legs would have to be amputated? They were covered by heavy bandages and looked as if they were badly hurt.

Finally the Major gained control of himself and began to tell me an amazing story.

Just a few hours earlier he had been a passenger in a helicopter. They had been hit by ground fire and crashed into the thick jungle. Six men had been scattered over the side of a mountain. When the Major came to, he realized he was injured too seriously to move. He could hear the cries of other men who were also unable to move. In the distance he could hear rifle shots. The Viet Cong were converging on the position where they had seen the copter go down. They were moving in to capture the Americans.

The Major suddenly realized he had reached the end. The VC would not attempt to carry out the wounded Americans. They would probably torture them to death.

He tried to pray, but realized he didn't know how. He had attended church all his life, but he had never really talked to God. But all at once he "felt" someone say: "Just ask and believe!"

With a burst of anguish, and in new faith he cried: "Oh, God, please help me!" He realized that for the first time in his life he had talked to God. Still, he could hear the VC move in closer.

Miles away, another Army helicopter was flying north. The pilot later told this story: He felt a sudden, overpowering urge to turn and go east. *But why?* he reasoned. His destination was north. Contrary to all military rules he made a

ninety-degree turn and headed east. He then felt an even stronger urge to fly lower and slower. This was even less logical than his first urge and contrary to all rules of flying over hostile territory. He should be flying either high or low and fast. But the urge was so strong that he went down to treetop level, and somehow knew that he was looking for something. There it was! He suddenly spotted the remains of a helicopter scattered over the jungle.

He had no idea how long it had been there, but he felt compelled to check it out. The jungle was so dense that it was impossible to land. While he hovered over the treetops, a member of his crew lowered himself by means of a winch. When the crewman reached the ground he found the wounded men. One by one he secured them to the winch and raised them into the helicopter.

When the last man had been lifted to safety, he secured himself and was pulled up. Just as he left the ground, the VC arrived and started firing at him. The pilot saw what was happening, and as soon as the man was clear of the trees he moved the chopper up and out.

In a few minutes the wounded men were safe in the hospital.

When the Major had finished his story he grasped my hand and said: "Chaplain, I just wanted you to come and help me thank God for His goodness to me. I'm going to serve Him the rest of my life!"

## Rejoice!

I returned from Vietnam in 1967 and was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia. Twenty-three years earlier I had left there, a handcuffed prisoner. Now I returned as chaplain! It was hard to even remember how I had felt then.

I was assigned as Brigade Chaplain for the twenty-one Officer Candidate companies and the twenty-one non-commissioned Officer Candidate companies. What an opportunity to lead future military leaders to Jesus!

It was an exciting challenge, yet I was ever aware of my own shortcomings. I had come to see God's power and presence in and around me, but I was often a reluctant vessel.

I experienced days of discouragement and knew that this was not God's will and plan for me.

I searched the Scriptures for clues. In John 17 I found Jesus praying to the Father for us, His followers. He prayed: "...that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves." That's what I wanted. The joy of the Lord, not just when things were going good, but always. Jesus prayed that I might have it, then what was keeping me from experiencing it continuously?

In Matthew 25:21 I read: "...thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

So it was a matter of my entering in. I had to do it; it wasn't given me just automatically. "But how do I enter in, Lord?"

In Luke 6:23 Jesus tells us that we are to leap for joy. He even describes when we are to leap for joy: "When you are hungry ... when men shall hate you ... when men shall reproach you ... when they cast out your name as evil ... rejoice in that day, and leap for joy."

"How do you expect me to leap for joy under those circumstances, Lord?" It didn't make much sense, but the more I read my Bible, the more scriptures I found saying the same thing. Was there a principle involved?

I read Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 12:9-10 he says: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Infirmities were the very things that up till now I had not been enjoying. But over and over again I found the words in my Bible: "Rejoice! Thank God for everything." The Psalmist continually spoke of joy in the midst of troubles. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing," says David in Psalm 30.

I was willing to try, but how?

One evening I felt God speaking: "Are you glad that Jesus died for your sins?"

"Yes, Lord, I'm glad, I'm glad."

"Does it make you feel good to think of His dying for your sins?"

"Yes, Lord, it really does!"

"Does it make you feel happy to know that He has given you eternal life by His death for you?"

"Yes, Lord, it does!"

"Do you have to strain or try hard to really be filled with joy that He died for you?"

"No, Lord, I'm filled with joy."

I knew that God wanted me to understand how easy it was to be glad that Jesus died for me. I could clap my hands, laugh, and sing with thanksgiving for what He had done for me. Nothing in my life was more important; nothing could give me more joy.

Suddenly I felt as if God was about to teach me something I'd never known before.

God said: "It really makes you glad that they took My Son and drove nails into His hands, doesn't it? It makes you glad that they took My Son and drove nails through His feet. It really makes you glad that they drove a spear through His side and the blood flowed down His body and dripped on the ground. It makes you very happy and you laugh with great joy because they did this to My Son, doesn't it?"

Everything became very silent. I didn't know how to answer.



"It makes you glad that all that was done to My Son, doesn't it?"

Finally I had to say: "Yes, Lord, it does. I don't understand it, Father, but I am glad."

For a moment I wondered if perhaps I had given the wrong answer. Perhaps I had misunderstood.

Then to my great relief I heard Him say: "Yes, My son, I want you to be glad!"

The joy within me increased as I realized that God wanted me to be glad. Then everything became very quiet again, and I knew I was about to learn something else.

"Now listen, My son. For the rest of your life when anything happens to you that is any less difficult than what they did to My Son, I want you to be just as glad as you were when I first asked you if you were glad Jesus died for you."

I said: "Yes, Lord, I understand. For the rest of my life I am going to be thankful. I'll praise You, I'll rejoice, I'll sing, I'll laugh, I'll shout, I'll be filled with joy for whatever You permit to come into my life."

It was easy to promise to rejoice right then; I was having a wonderful time in prayer. Joy was just flowing over me and through me like a stream.

The next morning I was sitting on the edge of my bed when I heard a voice: "What are you doing?"

"I'm sitting here wishing I didn't have to get up!"

"I thought we made an agreement last night."

"But Lord, I didn't know You meant things like *this!*"

"Remember what I said, 'in everything.'"

I said: "But Lord, I've got to be honest with You. I've been sitting on the edge of my bed every morning for twenty years wishing I didn't have to get up. I've been thinking how wonderful it would be if I could just lie down for five more minutes."

But the Spirit said: "You are supposed to be thankful that it is time to get up."

"Lord, that's a little beyond my ability to comprehend!"

The Lord is always very patient and kind: "Are you willing to be made willing?"

"Yes, Lord, I really am."

That night I went to bed praying: "Lord, this is a rough one. You're going to have to do it for me. I'll get up anytime You tell me to, but I don't know how to be thankful that it is time to get up."

All I could hear was: "Are you willing?"

"Yes, Lord, I am."

The next morning I woke up and the first thing that popped into my mind was my right big toe. I heard: "See if you can move it." I could.

"Are you thankful that you can move it?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Now try your ankle. Are you thankful?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Now your knee. Are you thankful?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Now see if you can sit up."

"Yes, Lord, I can. But I've got to be honest with You; I still wish I could lie down and go back to sleep."

Very patiently He said: "See if you can stand up. Are you thankful? Now see if you can walk to the bathroom. Look into the mirror. Are you thankful you can see?"

"Hallelujah!"

"Are you glad you can speak and hear?"

"Yes, Lord."

Then everything became very silent. I knew again that out of the silence I was to learn something from God.

"My son, because I love you I am going to teach you to be thankful for everything. You can learn standing right there with all the things you are thankful for, or I can let you go back to bed and not let you move, see, or hear until you learn."

I jumped two feet into the air and said: "Lord, I understand! I am thankful! I will always be thankful."

The next morning, and the next, and the next, the first thing I thought when I woke up was, "Lord, I'm thankful." Never again have I been sorry it is time to get up.

Paul said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities." Getting up in the morning had been an infirmity for me. God told me to take it and reverse it from pain into joy, and when I did, the power of Jesus and His joy came upon me.

I memorized and said over and over to myself the verse from I Thessalonians 5:16–18. "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

I was beginning to trust God more, but what about Satan? Can't he sneak in and attack us against God's will?

Satan can't do a thing to us unless he first gets God's permission. Remember, God allowed Satan to test Job. The only time God gives Satan permission is when God sees the tremendous potential in the thing passing through us and coming out as joy, pure joy!

The power of the resurrected Christ is in us. Miracles, power, and victory will all be a part of what God does in our lives when we learn to rejoice in all things.

One morning I got into my car to go to work. It wouldn't start. In the Army there is no excuse for being late to work. I said: "Okay, Lord, here I am. You must want me to learn something, so I thank You that this car won't start."

After a while someone came along and helped me get it started.

The next morning the same thing happened. "Thank You, Lord, I know You have some wonderful reason for having me sit here, so I'm going to be filled with joy, and praise You." Again I was able to get it started.

Later that day I took the car to the post garage. I told the manager my problem. He said: "I'm sorry, Chaplain, but the man who works on that kind of car has had a heart attack and is in the hospital. I hate to tell you this, but you'll have to take it to a civilian place." He had a pained expression on his face as he said it. "Chaplain, they know our mechanic is sick, and they'll really sock it to you. They've been doing that to everyone I've sent there."

As I drove toward the "civilian" garage, a voice tried to whisper to me: "Isn't it terrible that those civilians would take advantage of us Army people?"

I told that thought to go back to where it came from, and continued thanking the Lord that He had worked out this whole incident for my personal benefit. I said: "Lord, I know You are in this and I praise You for it."

I pulled in to the garage, and the manager came over with a writing pad in his hand. With a glint in his eye, he said, "Can I help you, Sir?"

I explained my problem to him, and he went through a list of things that "might be wrong."

"We can't repair that part here, so we'll have to send it to another shop. This, however, may not be the problem, so we may have to do something else. It could be several different things, but we'll keep looking till we find the trouble."

"How long will it take?"

With a smile he said, "I'm sorry, Sir, but I have no idea. It just depends."

I could imagine the cash register pounding away.

"How much will it cost?"

"I'm sorry, Sir, I have no idea what it may cost."

Our post garage was right. They were ready to get everything out of me that they could. "Thank You, Lord; You had a good reason for this."

I agreed to bring the car back the next morning to leave it there until they could find and fix whatever might be wrong.

I then managed with much difficulty to get the car started. I put it in gear and began to move forward. Just then the manager quickly stepped up and grasped my arm. "Wait a minute! I've just thought of what may be your trouble. Turn off the engine!"

With that he opened the hood and began to poke around with a screwdriver. In a few minutes he said: "Now try it and see how it works."

I stepped on the starter and the engine purred away like it was new.

"Wonderful! How much do I owe you?"

"Not a thing, Sir, glad to do it."

Then the Lord again spoke to my heart: "My son, what I wanted you to know was that your life is in the palm of My hand and you can trust Me for all things. As you continue to thank Me in all circumstances you will see how perfectly I work out every detail of your life."

"Hallelujah, Lord!" I bounced up and down on the seat for sheer joy. "Thank You, Lord! Thank You for showing me all these wonderful things."

I rejoiced, and realized that if I had grumbled and complained, the entire incident would have profited me absolutely nothing. How many opportunities I had passed up to let God teach me how much He loves me! Most of us go around carrying these opportunities as heavy burdens, but God has ordained through Jesus that all of these things can be revolutionized as they pass through us and come out as joy!

How glorious to know that at this very moment God wants to fill our hearts with overflowing joy. Not because of our goodness or our righteousness or our sacrifice. It depends on only one thing, on believing the Lord Jesus.

When we begin to really believe that, the power of God begins to break loose in our lives. That's what Jesus tried to explain to us when He said, "Leap for joy when they persecute you. When you are poor. When you have sorrow."

For many years I had suffered with painful headaches. I seldom complained about it; I just thanked God that I wasn't as bad off as some people. One day He said: "Why don't you try praising Me *for* the headache?"

"*For* it?"

"Yes, *for* it."

I began to lift up my thoughts in thanksgiving that God was giving me this headache as an opportunity to increase the power of the Lord in my life. The headache got worse. I continued to thank God, but with every thought of praise came increased pain. The pain reached an overwhelming state; I held on to thoughts of praise and thanks. Suddenly I was being flooded with joy. Joy seemed to pour over every cell of my body. I had never experienced such power in joy! I was certain that if I took a step I would rise clear up into the air. And the headache was completely gone!

For fifteen years I had suffered with hay fever at least six months out of the year. Many weeks were so bad that I sneezed and coughed and held a handkerchief to my nose all day long. I had taken shots, tried medicine after medicine, prayed, fasted, and prayed some more. I went to everyone I knew or heard of that would pray for me. Nothing helped.

Why did God let me suffer? Didn't He care that I felt so miserable?

My friend, Chaplain Curry Vaughn, had told me I should believe with him that God would heal me. I avoided seeing Curry when I had one of my attacks because he always kept telling me to keep on believing. I had tried believing for fifteen years and didn't know what more I could do.

One day I was scheduled to speak to a noon meeting of men in a local Methodist church. As I drove into Columbus, the water started pouring out of my nose and I sneezed so hard that it was difficult to keep on driving. The thought came: "Praise Me!"

I began to think of how good God was to let me have this infirmity of the flesh. He was permitting me to have it to teach me something. It wasn't an accident of nature that I was allergic to so many things. God had planned it this way for His glory and for my good. "Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness. If You want me to have this I'll just trust You to heal me whenever You want to."

"What do you want Me to do?"

"Heal me, Lord."

"Heal you or take away the symptoms?"

"Aren't they the same, Lord?"

"No, they are not."

"Okay, Lord, then just heal me and I won't pay any attention to the symptoms." With that I knew that God had showed me something new and wonderful. Every time I had prayed for healing in the past and tried to believe, I had always been defeated when the symptoms persisted. Now I knew that the symptoms meant nothing. Faith in God's promise was all I needed; then Satan could fake all the symptoms he wanted!

When I arrived at the meeting place my nose was still running like a faucet, and I was sneezing uncontrollably.

I said, "Lord, if You want me to make a fool of myself, I'm willing. I'm leaving my handkerchief here in the car and I'm going in to speak for You."

As I walked toward the church I began to feel better. When the meeting was over I suddenly realized that I had no symptoms of hay fever.

Day after day there were no symptoms. Then one evening as I was preparing to go to a prayer group, my nose started running.

I thought: "Lord, I can't go to the prayer group. Those ladies will think I've done something wrong and You've taken away my faith. They'll gather around and urge me to believe so You can heal me. But Lord, I know You've healed me, so I thank You for these symptoms."

At the prayer group one of the sisters began to exhort me to believe.

"But God has healed me," I insisted.

"Then why are you sniffing?"

"I don't know, but God knows, and I'm just praising Him."

On the way home I was continuing to thank Him for running my life just as He wanted to. If He wanted Satan to get in a few licks at me He must have good reason. He had permitted His own Son to suffer for me.

"Son?"

"Yes, Lord,"

"You've been faithful. You will never again have even one symptom unless you need it for your good."

Once again I bounced up and down on the seat. Never again would I pray for healing for the same thing twice. God says, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

## Praise Him

Discovering the power in praise was one of the most exciting experiences I'd ever had.

One day an Officer Candidate came to my office. He wept for a long time. "Sir, you must help me. My wife has been asking for a divorce. Her lawyer has just sent me the papers to sign. I just can't keep on with the Officer Candidate program. I don't even want to stay in the Army. Please help me."

"I know just how to get your problem solved. Let's kneel down and thank God that your wife wants a divorce."

He didn't understand. Carefully we went over the Scriptures together. At last he decided he might as well try it. We knelt together and he prayed, turning the whole situation over to God and thanking Him for having allowed it to happen.

When he returned to his unit he was so shaken emotionally that they gave him the rest of the day off. He went to his bed and lay there, repeating over and over, "Thank You, Lord, that my wife wants a divorce. I surely don't understand it, but Your Word says I should thank You for all things, so I'll do it." All day long he thought the same things over and over. That night he couldn't sleep, so he went on thanking God. The next day he went through training in a daze. "Lord, You know I don't understand, but I thank You anyhow."

That evening he was sitting in the mess hall having dinner. As he was eating, it suddenly hit him. "Lord, You really *must* know what is better for me, much more than I do. I *know* all of this must be Your will. *Thank You*, Lord; now I understand!"

At that moment another candidate tapped him on the shoulder and told him to come to the telephone.

In all the weeks he'd been a candidate, no one had ever wanted him on the phone.

When he lifted the receiver there was someone weeping on the other end. "Honey, can you ever forgive me? I don't want a divorce!"

Jesus didn't promise to change the circumstances around us, but He did promise great peace and pure joy to those who would learn to believe that God actually controls all things.

The very act of praise releases the power of God into a set of circumstances and enables God to change them if this is His design. Very often it is our attitudes that hinder the solution of a problem. God is sovereign and could certainly cut across our wrong thought patterns and attitudes. But His perfect plan is to bring each of us into fellowship and communion with Him, and so He allows circumstances and incidents which will bring our wrong attitudes to our attention.

I have come to believe that the prayer of praise is the highest form of communion with God, and one that always releases a great deal of power into our lives. Praising Him is not something we do because we feel good; rather it is an act of obedience. Often the prayer of praise is done in sheer teeth-gritting willpower; yet when we persist in it, somehow the power of God is released into us and into the situation. At first in a trickle perhaps, but later in a growing stream that finally floods us and washes away the old hurts and scars.

One Army wife came to me, convinced that her problem had but one solution. Her husband had developed an excessive drinking problem and for the past several years had been an alcoholic. Often he would pass out drunk on the living room floor where the wife or his teenage children would find him, stark naked. In this condition he'd also been found in the hallway of the apartment house where several other families lived.

In final desperation the wife decided to take the children and leave. Friends persuaded her to at least come talk to me first.

"Whatever you say, Chaplain, don't tell me to stay with him," she said. "I just can't do it."

"I don't care whether you stay with him or not," I said. "I just want you to thank God that your husband is like he is." Carefully I explained what the Bible had to say about thanking God for all things, and that if she tried it, God would be able to solve her problem in the best way.

She thought it sounded ridiculous, but finally agreed to kneel while I prayed that God would release in her enough faith to believe that He is a God of love and power who holds the universe in His hand.

At last she said, "I do believe."

Two weeks later I called her.

"I feel absolutely marvelous," she said. "My husband is a different man. He hasn't had a drink in two weeks."

"That's wonderful," I said. "I'd like to talk to him."

"What do you mean?" She sounded surprised.

"I just think it would be good if I talked to your husband about the power that is working in your lives."

"Didn't you tell him already?" She sounded puzzled.

"No, I haven't met him yet."

"Chaplain, this is a miracle," she cried out. "The day I was in your office he came home from work and for the first time in seven years he didn't go to the refrigerator for a beer. Instead he went into the living room and talked to the children. I was sure you had talked to him."

Our prayer of praise had released God's power to work in another person's life. The wife was openly crying over the telephone.

"Praise God, Chaplain," she sobbed, "Now I know God works out every detail of our lives."

A young soldier collapsed with a serious heart problem and was taken to the Fort Benning Hospital. He was released, but had to come back for frequent checkups and eventually was scheduled to go to another hospital for heart surgery. The news filled him with despair, and he began drinking. His despair increased until he decided to leave. He stole clothes from some of the men in the barracks and took off in the First Sergeant's car, which he wrecked totally.

The unhappy soldier was caught and put in the stockade to await trial. There another soldier led him to Jesus. I went to see him, and he was still feeling depressed and afraid that he had messed up his life so thoroughly that he couldn't be of any use to anyone.

"Your sins are forgiven and forgotten," I said. "Don't think of your past as a chain around your neck. Thank God for every detail of your life and believe He has permitted all of these things in order to bring you to the place where you are now."

Together we searched the Scriptures for God's word on all things working out for those who love Him.

"And that doesn't just mean things that happen after you've asked God to take over your life," I said. "God is able to use even our past mistakes and failures when we release them to Him with thanksgiving."

He understood, and began to thank God in earnest for everything that had happened. As his trial neared, his defense attorney told him the best he could hope for was a five-year sentence and dishonorable discharge. The soldier remained undaunted and insisted that whatever happened, God had full control of his life and would work out whatever would be for his good.

The General Court-martial had a surprise ending. General Court-martial is never held unless the military authorities believe that the crime warrants severe punishment. This soldier was sentenced to six months in the local stockade and no discharge from the Army.

With Chaplain Curry Vaughan I went to visit him in the stockade. We thought we were there to encourage him;

instead he encouraged us. He was filled with joy and it was catching. Soon the stockade rang with our laughter. The young soldier couldn't stand still; he laughed and ran and skipped around the visiting room.

Before we got ready to leave we asked how he was feeling. He had been scheduled for heart surgery and medically speaking was still in need of attention. He confessed that he felt very weak physically, and often his heart was troubling him. But he said: "It is wonderful. God is taking care of me."

We asked if he would like prayer for healing, and he said: "Please do; I believe God will heal me."

We placed our hands on him and believed that God, through Jesus, was right there healing him. The soldier smiled radiantly and said: "I believe it is done."

A few weeks later I talked to the man's Company Commander.

"I believe it's a waste of government money to keep this man in the stockade."

"Why, Chaplain?" he said.

"He isn't the same man who stole clothes and a car and wrecked it. He's completely changed."

The Commander agreed and had the man released. A week later I asked him how he felt.

"Chaplain, I used to get tired after walking one hundred yards. Now I can run and I never seem to get tired. God has healed me."

Wherever I went I now shared what I had discovered about the power of praise. I was beginning to learn that praise was not just a form of worship or prayer, but also a way of waging spiritual warfare.

Often when someone began to praise God for the problems that faced him, he found that Satan increased his attacks and the situation appeared to become worse instead of better. Many who tried the way of praise became discouraged and were unable to hold on to their belief that God was in charge.

Others simply didn't understand and refused to try praising God for unpleasant things. "It just doesn't make sense," they'd say. "I'm not doing to praise God for something I just don't believe He has anything to do with. How can God have anything to do with my broken arm or my wrecked car or my husband's horrible temper? I'd be foolish to thank Him for something like that."

Of course it doesn't make sense. The question is, does it work? It didn't make much sense when Jesus said, "Leap for joy when you are hungry or poor or persecuted." Yet He very definitely told us to do just that. In Nehemiah 8:10 I read: "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

The enemy's arrows just can't penetrate the joy of someone who is praising the Lord. In 2 Chronicles 20 we read how a whole army was defeated when the Israelites simply praised the Lord and believed Him when He said that the battle wasn't theirs, but His.

The message is just as clear today. The battle isn't ours; it is God's. While we praise Him, He sends our enemies scurrying.

Chaplain Curry Vaughan, Jr., had begun to experience the power of praise in his own life. Soon after he had started praising God for his difficulties, he arrived home one evening to learn that his two-year-old daughter had swallowed a glassful of mineral spirits, a type of high-grade turpentine. She had already been rushed to the hospital. Curry jumped into his car and raced full speed to be with her. His mind was swirling with thoughts of fear and worry. He suddenly realized what he was doing, slowed the car to normal speed, and praised the Lord for what had happened.

At the hospital they pumped out his daughter's stomach, x-rayed her and told Curry that two things were bound to happen. First, she would run a high fever that night; second, there was a ninety-five percent chance that she would develop pneumonia.

Curry and his wife Nancy took their daughter home, prepared to watch her very closely as the doctors had ordered.

At home Curry took his daughter in his arms and prayed: "Heavenly Father, I know that Satan has tried to attack me once again, and I have praised You! Now I claim in the name of Jesus that Virginia will not get a fever and she will not get pneumonia." The next morning Virginia woke up as bright and chipper as ever. She had suffered no ill effects.

A successful businessman came to see me about his teenage daughter. I knew the family and knew that their daughter had received more than the average amount of love and care, yet she had developed a violent hatred of her younger sister. She would lash out and strike her.

The distraught parents had taken her to the psychiatrist for treatment, kept her on tranquilizers and prayed for years that God would help them find a solution to their terrible problem.

They realized the danger as the violent outbursts increased.

I met with both parents and challenged them to try the one thing they had failed to do.

"What is that?" they both asked.

"Thank the Lord that He has given you this child to meet your need. Really praise Him for knowing exactly what would be the greatest blessing to your family."

At first they thought this was completely beyond what they could do. They had tried for years to solve the problem, and knew of no way to suddenly be glad that everything was exactly the way it was. We went through the Scriptures together and then prayed that God would work a miracle and help them to thank Him.

A miracle did happen. They began to feel and be thankful. They practiced this daily for two weeks. Instead of constant worry and fear, they experienced peace and joy.

One evening they were in the living room. Their oldest daughter stood in the middle of the floor holding a potted flower. She looked at them, and when she had their attention she smiled and dropped the pot in the middle of the rug.

Dirt, glass and flowers went in all directions. The girl stood smiling, waiting for their reaction. Both parents had given themselves so completely to the practice of praising God that they automatically said, at the same time: "Thank You, Lord."

The daughter looked at them in amazement. Then she lifted her head and, looking toward Heaven, she said: "Thank You, Lord, for teaching me." From that very moment she began to get well.

Her parents came to me rejoicing. The power of praise had worked. For years Satan had held the family in bondage through that girl. Now his spell was broken. In James we read that we are to draw near to God and resist Satan. In Romans 12:21 Paul describes how: "Don't allow yourself to be overpowered by evil. Take the offensive--overpower evil with good!"

Some have asked me if this principle of praise isn't just another way to talk about the power of positive thinking. Far from it. Praising God for every circumstance does not mean we close our eyes to the difficulties. In his letter to the Philippians Paul says to worry about nothing, but "In everything by prayer and supplication with *thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

When we praise God we thank Him *for* our situation, not in *spite* of it.

We are not trying to avoid our dilemmas. Rather Jesus is showing us a way to overcome them.

Praise is not another way of bargaining with the Lord. We don't say, "Now we've praised You in the middle of this mess, so get us out of it!"

God is calling us to praise Him, and the highest form of praise is the one Paul exhorts us to give in Hebrews 13:15: "By (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

The sacrifice of praise is offered when all is darkness around us. It is offered of a heavy heart, unto God because He is God and Father and Lord.

As we begin to praise Him, His Holy Spirit begins to fill our beings more and more.

To continually praise Him means a steady decreasing of self and an increase of the presence of Christ within us, until with Peter we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.