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**RECOVERY IN A DAY OF FAILURE**

**Part 3**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

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## TAKING GOD'S GROUND OF FAITH

*Reading: 1 Thess. 1; 1 Tim. 1:4; Heb. 11:32-34.*

It is not particularly the book of Judges which is the matter of our concern, but the burden of the Lord is bound up with that little clause at the end of 1 Thessalonians 1:9, “a living and true God”.

*“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith ...” (1 Thess. 1:3).  
“... to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).*

### **Knowledge of the living and true God**

If we were to read through the first and second letters to the Thessalonians, we should be greatly impressed with the fulness, richness, strength, victory, fruitfulness and effectiveness of these Thessalonian believers. We have often remarked upon it, and (it is certainly something which calls for remark), for some of the grandest and choicest things said to believers were said by the apostle to those at Thessalonica. He was able to say of them that they were exemplary; that is, that throughout a whole region their faith was spoken of and they were talked about; and that they were an example; and by means of them the Lord became known in a very extensive and effectual way. It means the Lord was known to them in no small and weak way. Their knowing of the Lord was a very effectual and fruitful thing over this wide region. They have been preserved by the sovereign work of God as a testimony right down the ages, and are before us now as a monument. When we come back to the root of this matter, and ask how this was, what the secret of the matter was, what lay behind it, the answer is found in this statement with two fragments brought together: “... your work of faith”; “... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”.

Therefore, there must have been a point at which these Thessalonians abandoned idols on the ground that they believed, without any previous history and experience or without being in possession of proof that there was a living and true God. Here were their idols, and there was this God of whom Paul had spoken, to whom Paul was a witness. They had no experience of that God, and they had nothing at present in themselves to prove that He was such a God as Paul had said. But they believed that He was a living and true God, and without anything in their own history to go upon they just took the step of faith in what God presented to them. Abandoning their idols they turned from them to serve a living and true God. That all sounds very elementary, but there is no doubt about its being basic to every discovery of God, to every fragment of knowledge that He is a living and true God.

In the first place, witness is borne to you that there is a living and true God. You have heard proclamation made, you have heard a declaration that God is. There is witness borne to God as Paul witnessed to these Thessalonians. It has been found to be so by a multitude who would give their lives for that testimony. It is presented to you from the outside. How are you going to prove it? How are you going to know it? How is He going to become to *you* a living and true God? There is only one way, and you are pinned down to it, but if you will accept it you will know as truly as these Thessalonians, and your knowledge of it may be just as fruitful as was theirs. "*Your work of faith*", in turning to serve a living and true God! Simple as it is in words, it concludes the whole matter. There is no getting out of it. There is no getting round it. The slightest fragment of personal knowledge that God is a living and true God demands an act of faith towards Him on your part; not proof, not evidence, not the answer to all your questions, not argument, nothing whatever but an act of faith towards Him, to serve Him. To serve Him is the giving of a very definite, active aspect to faith. You have got to act in faith, and faith is always faith if it is true to the Word. God never, in this dispensation, comes out and projects for us a kind of gangway across to Himself in proofs and evidences. This is a dispensation of faith, a dispensation appointed and fixed by God. It is as though God had said at the beginning of a certain period of this world's history: "From this moment up to a certain time which I shall fix, covering so many ages, so many generations, the whole character and nature of things is one of faith! I do not depart from that a hair's breadth, nor for an instant! The character, the nature, the governing law of this dispensation is faith. Try as you will, you will never get Me off that ground." God has

fixed it. No one will ever find Him on any other ground, by any other means. The past dispensation was different! You had only to do certain things and you discovered Him.

Go back to that time in the day of Israel and it seems that they almost walked by sight. It seems that the response of God to them was so instant, and so demonstrative, so manifest, that they almost walked by sight. But this is not that dispensation, this is a dispensation of faith; fixed, immovable, unalterable by God Himself. *But*, inasmuch as God has fixed it, and will not move from it, He will meet you on His own ground, He will answer to His own condition, and if you come on to the ground of faith you will know that God is a *living* God and a *true* God.

You may batter yourself against the door to know God in any other way, and you will batter yourself to pieces, but once you take God's ground of faith you discover Him. You turned to serve One of whom you had no experience, no personal history, but whom you believed to be. It has been proclaimed to you, but the evidence of those who say they know and have proved is all you have to go upon. You believe that He is a living and true God, and you turn, and in turning you discover God, and you have to say: "It is true! God is, and God is a living God, and God is a true God!" Then a history of knowing God has commenced.

Let all who are within the realm of what we have just said about the initial stage of knowing God lay it to heart. It is the only way to know God in a living and saving way in this dispensation. It is the sure way. Whether we have believed or not, whether we have turned or not, whether this work of faith has been in us or not, we shall wake up in the end to know that He is a living God, and that He is true — but then it will be a different discovery. Ultimately you cannot get away from the fact that God is a living and true God. Let that fact be laid to heart by any who are arguing, struggling, battering themselves in the dark to find God. You never will, until you exercise faith in God, until you believe that God is, and that "He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If He is that God that you are looking for He must be that. You do not want a God who is not a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. You may have your idea of the kind of God that He must be but He transcends all your highest ideas. You will never discover that He is, and you will never discover what He is, until there is a definite turning to Him in faith, which says, without knowing, without anything to go upon: "Oh God, I do not know You, but I believe that You are! I abandon myself to You, that You may make Yourself known to me!" That is very simple, but that is the way in.

The principle applies all the way along. You and I are still called to know the living God. That is going to be our history all along, to discover that He is a living God, and it is, of course, one of the elements of glory in our Christian lives that we do again and again come into the (shall we say) surprise. We make discovery again and again that the Lord is a living God.

That sounds as though we have been doubting that the Lord is alive, but it is not that. In some pressure, in some trouble, we have needed to know the Lord. We have been going round and round that 'Jericho', but not in faith. We have been trying to get to know the Lord in this way, in this matter, to be assured; perhaps pining and repining, groaning and moaning, struggling and agonising; everything but believing. Then one day the Lord shows us that an attitude of faith in Him, calling for an act of obedience, without any history, without any precedent, through faith in Him in this connection, is required, and when we turn and take that step of faith's obedience, that step of faith in the Lord over this thing, we discover He is a living God in that connection. That is the romance of the Christian life, that even those who know the Lord, and have very good reason to know the Lord, and have a lot of history with the Lord, of whom you might say that they are established in the knowledge of the Lord, again and again wake up to the fact that, after all, the Lord is alive. That sounds strange, but it is true. The discovery of the livingness of the Lord in multitudes of different ways comes by fresh steps of faith in Him in this dispensation of faith.

God locks us up to this, because this is a dispensation of faith. It is as though He said, "If you want to know Me in a living way more, and still more, in new discoveries, every fraction of this depends upon some fresh gesture of faith in Me." So I bring you into all kinds of conditions which demand faith in Me. It seems to me that the older we grow, and the more we know of the Lord, the more difficult do the tests of faith become. And it seems as though the nearer the end of the course we get the easier it is for faith to give up from one point of view, because the tests become so much greater and deeper, yet they lead to something which is so much ahead of all that has been as to the knowledge of the Lord.

### **Knowledge of God based on faith**

Faith is the law of this dispensation and God demands it for the knowledge of Himself in every way, if our relationship with Him is a true one. It is not necessary, though it might be of help, to touch on different ways

in which this is so. The fact is that you may be holding back from the Lord in some matter of obedience for a long time, exercised about it, and while you delay you are circumscribing and limiting your knowledge and enjoyment of the Lord. All the time witness is borne that if only in faith you take that step of obedience you will find the Lord in a new way; and then eventually you yield, and in the obedience of faith in the Lord, because you believe it is the Lord's will, you do it, and almost immediately you make a discovery. The Lord is more alive to you than ever He was before. There is a livingness about your relationship with the Lord which is new, which is fresh, which is added to all your past knowledge of Him. All you have to say, the only way you can put it, is that the Lord is a living God.

We are not dealing with doctrine. We are not dealing with laws and regulations, which are optional. We are not dealing with things being imposed upon us as a system to which we must adhere. We are dealing with a living God, and what we discover is not some new gratification because we have got over a difficulty; we discover *the Lord*.

For the testimony to Himself, God more and more needs those who know Him as a living and true God. That knowledge is going to be promoted by God by way of tests of faith, and all those who are going to be of the greatest value to God on this earth, in conditions such as they are, will be those who have come to know God by way of faith exercised in Him in the midst of the most acute difficulties! We give our lives to the Lord; in all honesty of heart we declare ourselves as being on this earth for God and there is nothing which has any place in our interest, consideration, desire or ambition beside the Lord's interest. So far as we know our own hearts, that is our position before God: complete consecration to Him. Then we move as we believe God leads us to move. The course of our history finds us taking such steps, moving in such directions, in such matters, as we believe are God's will. We have prayed over them, committed them to the Lord and then we have acted after prayer in a way which we believe to be God's way. Then concerning these very things we come into the greatest troubles of our life, very often a terrible tangle seems to come about because of those things. Everything seems to say it was all wrong; God was not in it, had no place in it. What are we going to do? How can we go through life like that? We have trusted God, we have been honestly here for God, and now in the things about which we prayed, in which we had no personal interest as far as we knew our own heart — and we challenged God to root out anything that we did not know — as a result of all our trusting God, and all our committing to Him, we have

come into this horrible mess, and everything says that it was wrong, and God was not in it. How are we going to get through life like that?

The issue is clear. If you are going to be honest, if you are not going to hedge, you are going to take one of two courses: abandon a life of trust in God and take things into your own hand, or (and there is no middle course), stand to it that God is faithful, and eventually you will see a divine plan brought out of all this confusion.

Humanly it looks like a hopeless situation. There seems no redeeming it. We cannot record it as being of God! Are we going to capitulate to that? Or we may as well give it all up! If we take that position we may as well say, "It is vain to trust the Lord" and not do it any more. That is the honest course to take if you are going to accept that level of things. The alternative is this other thing: "I seem to be in the most awful mess, and everything seems to have gone wrong. My steps of faith and trust in the Lord have brought me into an awful confusion, and everything seems to be a contradiction that God ever had anything to do with me at all, *but I believe God!*" Out of this there will come something which will make it perfectly clear that, although it may not have been altogether God's first directive will, it was His permissive will; and something for *Him*, for His glory, comes out of it which justifies it, and does not condemn the whole thing. Take that ground and you will discover that God is a living and true God, that in all this God is not dead, He is not a false God, and not unfaithful.

Some of us know that this means an utter attitude. We are either going under or we are going to take this attitude. Such as are brought into that position most deeply and severely, where they think they have an overwhelming mass of seeming evidence that God has failed, that God has let them down, God never honoured their trust in Him, God never took responsibility for their ignorance when they acted before Him in perfect honesty, are those who, in the intention of God, are to make the greatest discovery of Him, and to know Him in such a way as to be of tremendous value.

### **An illustration**

Take a simple illustration of this in the case of the apostle Paul in the storm on the Mediterranean. If Paul had wanted apparent proof that he had made a series of mistakes, that storm provided him with all those apparent proofs. If Paul had sat down and said, "I was a fool to appeal to Caesar! If only I had not appealed to Caesar we should not have been in this, and I

have made an awful mistake! They tried to persuade me not to go to Jerusalem and I insisted upon going to Jerusalem, and now it is because of my folly and my mistake that I am in this condition! This is an ignominious end! The Lord has left us to our own devices, the ship is going to pieces, and we shall all be lost!” There was any amount of evidence to prove that he had been wrong. What was his attitude? “*I believe God, that it shall be even as He hath said*” (Acts 27:25). I believe God! When? When neither sun, nor moon, nor stars appeared, when a great tempest lay on them, when the ship already was creaking and its timbers parting one from another, when all hope that they should be saved was given up. I believe God! What was the result? The ship’s company was captured. We do not know how it was carried out, but we are told that the Lord said that He had given Paul all them that sailed with him. The Lord had put them into his hands in some way. There was a trail of results, not the least of which was the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, and one or two more, lasting over the greater part of a thousand years in building up saints, and causing us to continually believe in God.

Two ways were open to Paul. One was that he could believe that God was failing him, to lose faith in God, to capitulate to the appearances, which were grim. Get into a Mediterranean storm and see that there is no myth about it. I have seen ships in the Mediterranean which seemed to disappear from sight, and after what seemed like minutes have seen their masts appearing again and coming up; mighty war ships seem to have gone down with the waves. Now in the midst of that Paul said, “I believe God.”

We know something of that in our spiritual experience. All hope that we should be saved given up, neither sun, nor moon, nor stars appearing. There is a spiritual counterpart. We know what it is when the tempest is upon us. What expressive words they are; “... no small tempest lay on us ...”. A long-drawn-out conflict with spiritual elements, and all the time the whisperings of the devil, “You have made a mistake! You have gone wrong! You have taken the wrong way! God has left you to your own devices!” What is going to be our attitude?

Do not think that in speaking like this, with this emphasis, we for a moment claim to be in the position we say we have to be in; that is, the alternative to abandoning everything. God needs that which is a knowledge of Himself which is not a meagre knowledge. And that knowledge is to be possessed only through faith towards Him, which is tested and maintained through these deep and dark experiences.

It could frighten us, but we will not be frightened. We know that God will not put upon us more than we are able to bear. We know that we shall be inwardly strengthened in the day of the test. The point is this, that it is the definite, active faith in God in the midst of all that seems to contradict which is the way of discovering in a new way that He is a living God.

Sometimes it seems that God is not living in some matters, as though God were not livingly associated at all. It is all a big test of faith. Then when faith which has been tested takes a deliberate attitude towards God, you discover that in that particular connection, where God seemed to have no interest, no concern, no relationship, He is, after all, a living God. In that particular thing God seemed to be away from you, and you have been tested. Now you have discovered in a new way, in a specific connection, that He is a living and true God. That underlies everything.

It gives the key very largely to the book of Judges again. Here are the representative members of the judges mentioned, the men who stand out perhaps most conspicuously: Gideon, Samson, Barak, Samuel, and Jephthah. These are the judges, and it says that these men did all that they did in the delivering of God's people through active faith in God, when everything seemed to have gone. Oh, what recovery it was because, as we have pointed out, there was a state of things where a great difference had taken place as to God being in evidence. In the days of Joshua, God was so marvellously in evidence all the time. Now, because of this declension, God is not in evidence in the same way. He is not right on the spot taking the initiative. He is allowing circumstances, in a sovereign and providential way, which are exceedingly bitter and adverse. Then these men exercise faith in God in the midst of those conditions, with wonderful results. They discover that God, after all, is not dead, as He seemed to be, but is a living and true God, but always and only living and true to nothing else but to faith.

Faith does not make God living, but faith discovers that God is living. Let us not mix faith with psychology, that if only you can believe a thing is, it is. That is not the point. We do not make God alive by faith; we do not make God true by faith; He is infinitely more than we know Him to be. We shall discover Him by faith, and we shall discover far more as faith increases. The Lord make us men and women of faith, not for our own deliverance, satisfaction, justification and vindication, but because God needs the knowledge of Himself here among men, and God needs a vessel prepared with that kind of relationship to Himself for administering in His coming Kingdom.

## FEATURES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

*“Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves” (Judges 5:2).*

When we speak of spiritual leadership we must keep out of our minds what we might call official leadership, appointment to position, and such like. We are concerned with leadership which is *spiritual*.

It does not require a very thorough searching of the Scriptures to discover that in all times the interests of the Lord have been very largely and very definitely bound up with the spirit of leadership, and that when that spirit was absent things were in a very bad way; the Lord's interests were not being advanced; there was barrenness and unfruitfulness. Weakness, defeat and dishonour prevailed always when there was an absence of spiritual leadership. When the Lord would have an increase, an advance, a development, or a fuller realisation of His end He always moved anew in the matter of spiritual leadership.

We have already seen a correspondence between the times of the Judges and our own time, things being in a bad spiritual state. Perhaps the main good is a renewing, growing, strengthening cry for a fresh visitation of God. That is a good thing, but it declares a bad state, it represents that things are very much other than they should be.

In times such as the times of the Judges, and in our own time, recovery as to the Lord's full mind for His people is bound up with spiritual leadership, so that we can truly say that there is a very great need for this in our time. It is very difficult to find this thing in any real and commensurate way today. Everything is of a very low level and measure. We have all found a fairly general level, which is not very high. There is nothing which speaks definitely and strongly of the spirit of leadership.

If we recognise and accept that, there is the possibility of our coming to some profitable consideration of what the Lord would do, and how He

would do it through a clearer understanding of what spiritual leadership is, to meet the Lord's need and the need of the Lord's people.

### **The securing of a people to God's end**

In the first place let us remember that spiritual leadership has always to do with the securing of a people to the end which God has willed. God has an end in view for His people; He is not just working haphazardly, moving without design. The end of God is, to Himself, clearly, fully and finally defined and settled, and He never departs from that and will accept nothing other or less. God has a full end in view, and He will make a full end, and will reach that full end.

Spiritual leadership is always related to securing a people to that end. There may be phases, or initial steps in the salvation or the deliverance of that people. After the initial stage all the other stages, right up to the final crowning stroke to bring them in at last, will call for the extra putting forth of power for such a people. Whatever the point is at which we take up this purpose of God, the spiritual leadership in it is related to the end, not to any particular phase at any time as something in itself.

We must not isolate any part or any stage of God's work and make it something in itself and an end in itself. The matter of the unsaved, for instance, is relative and not detached or exclusive, and must never be made so. The sanctifying of believers, the leading of them into a life of holiness, is not something round which you may put a hedge and call it by a title, or make it something that ends with itself. That is only a step, a stage. So it is with everything else. It is all related to the full end and must ever be maintained in that relatedness.

We must see, then, that spiritual leadership is the securing of a people to God's full end, to the end which God has willed for that people. We can never say that God intended to bring out a people and leave them a third of the way, or two-thirds of the way, or nine-tenths of the way. God intends that they should go right through, by successive stages, and every gift of the spirit of leadership was but to carry them forward to the full end. It is important to recognise that.

### **The end will never be reached here**

Another thing in connection with spiritual leadership is this, that the end will never be reached here. It always relates ultimately to heaven and

not to earth. It never has been, and never will be, complete here. That is shown very forcibly in the types. Abraham, with all the promises and sovereign movements of God in his life, with all the advance made (and there was tremendous advance of a spiritual kind made in his life from Ur of the Chaldees onward), came to the place where he realised that the end could never be reached here. He looked for “a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker was God” (Heb. 11:10). When we find a quotation to that effect in the New Testament we know that the context points out clearly that it was not an earthly thing at all but a heavenly. Then we know that Israel looked for a country, and the apostle tells us that it was “heavenly”, which carries things beyond Canaan. Then when Israel came into the land they never fully possessed it, and if they had there would still have been something lacking. Again, in the letter to the Hebrews we are told that they did not enter fully into God’s rest, that even Joshua could not bring them wholly into the rest. “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). So wherever you look at the types you find there is a falling short, and they point to the fact that God’s full end can never be reached here; it relates to heaven and not to earth. It is important to recognise that in spiritual leadership. You will see how that bears upon things as we go on.

Never let us think that we shall reach something here that is complete, perfect and final. We never shall, however far we go. However much we advance and progress we shall come at the end to realise that there is still a very great deal further to go, and that extra bit is not an earthly thing at all. As a matter of fact the spiritual consciousness of truly spiritual people is that the further they go with the Lord the more other-worldly do all their interests become. That is, the more they are separated from things here and attached to heaven. They find that it is essential to do that, because of the invariable and inevitable failure of anything in a creation which lies under a sentence of vanity and cannot reach its end until the manifestation of the sons in glory. That governs this matter. It should not be a discouragement, but it should be a reinforcement.

### **Spiritual leadership sometimes bound up with a people**

Spiritual leadership is not always bound up with individuals, it is sometimes bound up with a people. This again is set out in types. There were leaders in *type* who were individual. We stress the word “type” because so often this natural man gets hold of the Old Testament idea of

leadership and tries to reproduce it in our time. God does not do that. In types we see spiritual leadership entrusted to individuals, but we also see it with peoples, with a tribe for instance. “Who shall set the battle in array?” “Who shall go before?” And the Lord said that Judah should set the battle in array, that Judah should lead the people. A whole tribe becomes endued with the spirit of leadership. We make that point at the moment as we work towards the application, in order that we might realise that God sometimes raises up a people as well as individuals for the purpose of spiritual leadership. He sometimes raises up a collective testimony to set a standard for the rest of His people, something expressed in a corporate body by which all His people shall see more of His thought, and be to them an advance guard in the purpose of God.

We have been speaking of the assembly at Thessalonica, and have seen how they were an example to all that believed, and that through them the Word went out into all the region, and that they were spoken of everywhere. Evidently spiritual leadership was there. You see at once the nature of leadership when you look at it. People did not set themselves up as a body in front of all the Lord’s people to lead them on, but it was a spiritual influence, something emanating from a spiritual company, and it had the effect of leading the Lord’s people on, and showing the way, showing what was possible through faith. The Lord would do that kind of thing as much today as ever for a collective testimony which serves Him in the capacity of spiritual leadership; but we must not allow our personal and our individual responsibility to be lost in the collective.

### **Bearing the brunt of the opposition**

There is one more thing by way of introduction. Spiritual leadership always means the bearing of the brunt of the first line opposition. Quite obviously leaders must meet the first line of opposition, and in spiritual leadership it means that the brunt of things falls upon the leadership. Those who are in the position of spiritual leadership, will know more of the fury, antagonism, hatred, malice and evil cunning of the oppressor than perhaps the average child of God, or people of God, will know. That explains a good deal. Remember that it is something to be expected.

Having said those things of a general nature, we come closer to the meaning of spiritual leadership.

## **Leadership from God's standpoint: always and essentially spiritual**

That means several things:

### ***a) Natural qualifications are not the governing factors***

The book of Judges has already shown us that. These whom God raised up were, on the natural plane, anything but what the world would choose as its leaders. They suffered from various kinds of handicaps, and their handicaps are made perfectly clear. Ehud was a left-handed man, and that fact, in Scripture, is always intended to indicate human or natural weakness from God's standpoint. It is a type, but that is what it is intended to indicate. Deborah was a woman, indicating that again something out of the usual is in view from God's standpoint. Gideon was the least in his father's house. He was away in a corner, threshing wheat to hide it from the enemy, largely unknown, and not one in any prominent public position, not one about whom we have anything to say as to his natural qualifications. Jephthah was handicapped by the unfortunate birth, and driven out by the other members of his family because he was not a true member of the family. What a handicap for a man to be a leader among the Lord's people!

Natural qualifications are clearly not the governing factors here, and from God's standpoint they never are. Leadership is spiritual. Human personality, which counts so much with the world, is not the first consideration with God. There is personality which is produced by spirituality which is far more effective than the strongest personality among men. Real spirituality (in leadership) means discernment, perception, judgement, understanding and wisdom, insight and strength. It emerges spontaneously as the result of a secret history with God.

I remember once hearing something said of a certain man, that it did not matter where he was, whether in a board meeting, or committee meeting, (though he might only be invited to attend that meeting for a special purpose), if he was there even for a little while, spontaneously the whole meeting turned to him, and he became the unofficial chairman for the time being. That was because of his judgement and insight. It is an illustration that spiritual personality is something which is developed in a secret history with God while human personality is not a first consideration with Him.

Moses was something when he left Egypt at the age of forty. When he left the wilderness forty years later he was nothing. Then it was that God

could come in and give him spiritual leadership. He sought to assume leadership at the age of forty, on the basis of what he was in Egypt. Forty years later he was loth to accept spiritual leadership at all, and had to get it from God. Leadership is clearly a matter of the spirit.

Joshua and the judges give us the same lesson. Then in connection with David you will notice what Samuel was looking for: a man of personality, of stature, of manifest qualifications. The Lord made it clear that He was looking on the heart, and not on the outward appearance. When David entered in, (the one who would never have been selected but rather left out of account), the Lord told Samuel to anoint him. Then there is Paul. While so much is made of Paul's natural qualifications and achievements, Paul would never stand on that ground himself. We know that it is the spiritual value of Paul that counts, not any natural ability. Enough has been said to prove that leadership is spiritual, that it is a matter of spiritual qualities and features being pre-eminent.

This word is for the one who may think himself or herself the very least, the one who might feel that leadership could never come their way. We are talking about spiritual leadership. All other ideas and considerations must be deliberately thrust aside, and we must remember this, that leadership is constituted by God, and is the result of His approbation of a life lived in secret with Him. There is no other qualifying, no other training; it is not taught in the schools; it is a life in secret with God, upon which God's eye is resting, and in due time, when that eye is satisfied, God moves and says: "This is My son, in whom is My delight!" and gives him to be a leader and commander to the people under anointing. We have used those words, not to apply them generally to everybody, but to apply the truth. I believe that there is far more in the thirty years of the hidden life of the Lord Jesus than we know. It is impossible to think for a moment that those thirty years were of no account, that they were not under the eye of God and had no meaning. I believe they had the greatest meaning. The declaration at the Jordan was not only to do with the Eternal Sonship; God was not recognising among men One who was other than the rest of men. I believe it was God's acknowledgment of what had been going on for thirty years. Those thirty years were hidden, silent, but the eye of God was upon them, and because of what had gone on in the thirty years the Father was able to say that in Him was His delight. Then He was anointed.

That is the law which holds good; therefore I believe that it is essential unto spiritual leadership that we should have a probation which is under the eye of God. Oh, this mechanical taking hold of the work of God,

and taking hold of the lives of young men and women, bringing them out of business and putting them into responsible positions at home and abroad! What wreckage and loss there is by that false system of things! God chooses the workers, not men; God chooses the work, not men; and God brings the workers and the work together when He is able to say: "I am well pleased!" Until God can say that there will be delay. In any case there will not be that full approbation of God, and that full effectiveness and fruitfulness that there should be, until God has put that life under probation and watched for faithfulness, watched for the relationship of that life to Himself under all the most difficult conditions. There is no royal road to spiritual usefulness. There is no quick way into a position of value.

God will put us into a place of business, and will make that very hot for us. Our inclination will be to get out of business into the Lord's service, and thus we are breaking with the very dispositions of God for our lives if we do, because God is there seeking to find that ground of approval which will lead to His choosing of us.

Let us be careful of our ideas of service and usefulness to God. Leadership is spiritual, it is not official; it is not by appointment, or by choice. It is the result of God's approbation. If God looked down upon that period of our lives which He intended to be the preparation time and saw us always shirking, refusing to take responsibility, wanting to get out of it to something else, trying to get round things as quickly and as easily as possible, then we should not be approved, and there would never be God's choosing.

A word like that is very necessary. It is governed by this word: "... the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). That truth governed David. That clearly indicates that the Lord had His eye on David all the time he was in the field with those few sheep, and when at last he came out it was in spite of the set-back which his brethren would have given him, in spite of the hatred of Saul, in spite of all powers set against him. He had to come through to spiritual leadership because he was approved of God. Wherefore Paul will exhort us to study to show ourselves approved. It is a strong position.

So then leadership is not official, it is spiritual. Let us not think of leadership of a movement, for instance, or of some institution. Let us keep the spiritual always in our minds.

### ***b) Walking with God and not with men***

The thing which is required in this case is that those concerned walk with God in the first instance, and not with men. No one will misunderstand that. There are all the values of fellowship, all the values of counsel. The Lord would never have us brush aside the mature experience of any of His servants which can be placed to our help and good, but the Lord would have us have a life with Himself, so that within our own hearts the Holy Spirit can corroborate what others say, so that we know the voice of the Spirit. When we hear anything we know whether it is the voice of the Spirit; when we hear advice and counsel we know in our hearts whether it is the voice of the Spirit. It is an inward walk with God, a basic essential to spiritual leadership. It is a great thing to find young men and women walking with God, not apart from their fellows, and not showing superiority or independence in relation to available counsel and experience, but at the same time walking with God themselves. Nobody who has experience will expect the younger believer to accept what they say right away or come under their government, but will expect anyone who is spiritual to take the attitude that they will hold that before the Lord, and, given the Lord's witness, will follow in that way. That is walking with the Lord and this is an essential to spiritual leadership.

### **Features of spiritual leadership**

We have said that spiritual leadership is marked by certain spiritual features. What are they?

#### ***a) Spiritual understanding***

It need not be full, complete, mature understanding, but it is that faculty of the spiritually minded by which it is possible to discern between what is of the Spirit and what is otherwise. It is something which cannot be defined, which cannot be explained in words, but something which can be known. We can only say, as to our experience of it: "Well, the Lord gave me no assurance about that; I lacked that sense that it was of the Lord." It could be put in a thousand ways. Spiritual understanding is just being able to see the difference between what comes of man and what comes of the Spirit of God; what is of ourselves and what is of the Lord; the difference between even the best intention and motive in the interests of the Lord and that which the Lord really considers to be the best thing in His interests.

The Lord's mind is so completely other than our mind even about His own things and His own interests. Spiritual understanding is that power,

that capacity and faculty for discerning, judging, registering differences. Sometimes that spiritual faculty will lead us to refuse a whole realm that would be argued for by the natural mind, even in the interests of the Lord, as being the course to be taken, the thing to be done, what would glorify God. It is brought home to us like that, and within us there is something which sets itself against that, which will not give us the confirmation that, after all, however good it may seem, and however right, we are not sure. We cannot tell why we are not sure, we cannot give an argument against these things, but in ourselves we know.

On the other hand, that faculty leads us to move out into realms which all the common sense of the natural mind would be set against, to do things which would be perfectly mad to the natural mind. No one can define or explain it, but it can be known, and it is basic and governmental to spiritual leadership. It is judgement of a spiritual kind. It is not our task to impose the results of it upon other people, nor for us to judge other people according to that. It is for us to walk with God and not be taken hold of by things or people, but be faithful to God because in our hearts we know! How we know we cannot tell, but we know, and that is all there is that can be said about it. We know that God says, No! and God says, Yes! and that brings us into conflict with every argument that man would bring to bear upon the situation. But to be true to God we cannot, or we must (as the case may be), and that by inward spiritual understanding. It is an essential, and every child of God can have it and should have it. It is the normal state of a life in the Spirit. It is just as natural to the new man as our own judgements are to our old man. We know in the natural what our inclinations and our disinclinations are. We ought to know just as truly in the new man, in the new creation, what the inclinations and the disinclinations of the Spirit are. Paul uses the term “spiritually-minded”.

That does not mean that you have a kind of abstract ‘something’ that you call a mind. In Scotland they have a way of expressing it which is a very good interpretation of Paul’s language. They say about a matter, “I was minded to do” or, “Are you minded to do that?” Spiritual-mindedness is that you are minded in a positive way, in a certain direction; your inclination is that. This is natural to the spiritual, the new creation, if the life is lived in the Spirit. It is not something extra, but is born with the new child. Spiritual understanding is so important for spiritual leadership, and we should seek it from the Lord more and more, together with the development of it by the Holy Spirit in us, who is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, or revelation.

***b) The full assurance of spiritual understanding***

Then there is this extra thing, the full assurance of understanding. How necessary *that* is to spiritual leadership! Where you find lack of that assurance you find the inability to give a lead, or to take a lead. Any kind of uncertainty, indefiniteness, or lack of assurance means paralysis. The apostle prays for believers that they may come to the full assurance of understanding. What a thing that is! It is being fully persuaded and fully assured on the matter. The Lord would have us like that. It is the positive side, or element, in understanding. It is one thing to have perception, it is another thing to believe your perception, to stand on your perception, to commit yourself to your perception, for that perception to be strong enough to govern your whole life and lead you to take risks. Full assurance of understanding is an essential to spiritual leadership.

We will close there for the moment, so far as points are concerned, and conclude with one further general word as to spiritual leadership.

We have sought to strip this whole matter of all ideas of the official, of appointment, of headship in movements, and such things, and to recognise that it comes down to this: here are multitudes of the Lord's people who hardly know their right hand from their left, groping in mists and shadows; multitudes of the Lord's people who are remaining babes spiritually, far beyond the time when they ought to have moved from the infant stage. There is a great need for an increase of the knowledge of the Lord among His people. There is a tremendous need for a voice of authority and assurance coming from directions where the Lord is known.

You and I can come into such a relationship with the Lord that would result in that need being met in some measure. If you can help another child of God out of your knowledge of the Lord into a fuller knowledge of the Lord, then you are a spiritual leader, you have got spiritual leadership in principle, you have leadership in spirit. The urge of the Lord at this time is that He wants His people to come up out of that general state, out of that latent spiritual life, to represent something more for Him of a positive character.

No one will stand up and begin to throw their weight about as an assumed leader. They will soon meet the judgement of the Lord if they assume to follow Abimelech. The Lord wants something more positive in His people, that positive element which can be an adding of Him to others, a real leading of His people into some greater fulness. He needs leadership of a spiritual kind, and He challenges us all as to where we are by asking, "Are you a passive one? Are you one who is always deriving and never

contributing? Are you just a passenger being carried? Are you all the time waiting for things to come to you?" That will be one realm to which He will speak. Then in other realms He will speak also. He will seek, even where there is responsibility being carried and a measure of leadership being expressed and fulfilled, to bring back the necessity for recognising that we must not surrender ourselves to men or systems or order or organisations. The thing that is needed is spiritual leadership.

So many put the machine in the place of the man, allow that real spiritual value which is related to a man who knows God to be lost in a great organisation. You would not believe how many men are lost in an organisation, how much spiritual value is lost in the institution. It is the *thing* that is carried on, and it is not the knowledge of God in a man that is the supreme value.

How often things have changed like that! God raised up a man who walked with Him, who was approved of God, and drawn into spiritual leadership. Then the Lord's people became tremendously enriched through that man who knew God. He led the Lord's people into a new spiritual place. Then either towards the end of his life or after he was gone, people took hold of his life work and turned it into an organisation, an institution, a movement, and it is now being run on that line, with a great administrative department, and it is no longer acknowledged of God; it is carried on as 'a piece of work'. What is the result? It is not really the increase of the Lord, but it is an extension of a kind of work for God. The judgement is not intended to fall upon the work, the judgement is intended to fall upon this terrible loss to the Lord's people as well as to the Lord. God does not want Philistine carts, but living Levites to carry the testimony — men who walk with Him.

It is not enough for us to have a secret, quiet life with the Lord, but to recognise that that involves us in responsibility to the Lord's people, a responsibility which we must take. If you are passive God will leave you there, and you will be in a backwater. You may be a leader in spiritual qualification by your knowledge of the Lord, but you are not recognising the fact that that involves you in something quite active for the Lord, to give what you know of the Lord. The leader must take the lead, not assume a position, not be self-assertive, but seek to be active in the interests of the spiritual life of the Lord's people, and by that means you will find the Lord moves you into an adequate occupation. You may be waiting for someone to give you a job. The Lord will not give you a job while you wait. Move out in a positive way to give what you have of the

Lord where you see the need as the Lord gives you liberty, and you will find your time becoming more and more occupied, and you will have the job without any official appointment. If that is so you can take it that the Lord will take responsibility and look after you.

This touches us in the ordinary spheres of the home and the office, and anywhere else. Leadership is not a matter of coming out of all else and taking up the work of God. It is the expression of our knowledge of God in a positive way. What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for something to happen? Are you waiting for the Lord to come and put you into an experience of a testimony? Have you a knowledge of the Lord? Have you been shown that there is a greater fulness of the Lord? Has that been presented by you? Take a step of faith in relation to it, and if it is God's will for you, believe that you have it. Your belief will not make that thing, but your faith will bring you into the enjoyment of it. Perhaps it is just passivity that is keeping you out of things. When the Lord says there is water, step out. You will make the discovery when you step out that there is something more solid than water there.

*To be continued*