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**RECOVERY IN A DAY OF FAILURE**

**Part 4**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

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**FEATURES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP**  
**(Continued)**

*c) Active faith*

We touched on this matter of active faith at the end of our last meditation. However we want to note this difference, that this faith is very often strongest and truest in the matter of going on in the midst of apparent contradictions, not in objective undertakings. We will not stay to illustrate at length.

You will remember Abraham, a man who met an apparent contradiction to everything that the Lord told him to do, that the Lord had assured him of. The Lord had said certain things, and then the Lord met him and seemed to counter the whole thing as he went on. God said He was going to give Abraham the land, and when he came into the land he found it humanly impossible to stay and he had to quit. God told him that his son would be the vehicle of the seed that should be without number, yet then seemed to come in and contradict it. Now Abraham, who is the outstanding example of faith, shows his faith not so much by the great objective undertakings and adventures as by surely going on in the midst of repeated contradiction, when all that he had been led to expect seemed to be reversed. The way he expected to be quite clear became most complicated and entangled, and seemingly impossible. However he believed God, and went on. That is active faith.

As we pointed out, Paul illustrates this when he was in the Mediterranean, and everything was going to pieces; neither sun, moon nor stars appeared for many days, and all hope that they should be saved was cast away. In the midst of all that he said: "I believe God!" That was no contradiction, it was active faith. Until you and I come into that position in some measure, we shall be useless in spiritual leadership. If you and I, in the midst of contradictions, go under, become paralysed, begin to raise questions to the Lord, while those questions prevail, our value in bringing others into any measure of Christ is arrested. True spiritual leadership

requires this active faith. As we have already said, we must believe God in the midst of the raging tempest when everything seems to be threatened by disaster.

We are keeping very close to the book of Judges in all this, and we are especially keeping close to Christ. Bring all these things alongside of the Lord Himself while He was here on the earth, and you will see that they are all features of Christ. It would be profitable to go through the life of Christ with each one of them. Did He have spiritual understanding to see through and discriminate the fine issues? When Peter said, "I will follow thee even unto death", did He see through Peter? Did He, in effect, say: Oh yes, I knew you mean it quite well, Peter, but that is you, not God in you! You will come to the place one day when the Lord will take you through the depths, but it will not be because *you* can go through! Did the Lord Jesus have the full assurance of understanding? "He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes", who were the public authority. When He spoke there was something there which made people say, "This Man knows His ground! He is on solid ground, and He knows it." You do not find any uncertainty with Him; it is, "Yea and Nay." Did He endure? Did He hold through when everything went to pieces around Him? Yes! Follow those points through in His life. These are features of Christ.

#### ***d) Spiritual initiative in the matter of responsibility***

We have spoken of responsibility to one another, and will not say much more about it, but the Lord does need His people to be where they really will take the initiative in responsibility. There are so many of the Lord's people who are all the time waiting for a lead before they move. They will never do anything until they are pulled out and you have to stand by, and if you leave them for a moment they will go down. Oh, for more of that spiritual initiative in responsibility for the Lord's interests among His people.

Let us say this brief word on the matter. There is confusion, chaos, paralysis and tragedy in many lives for the very reason of passivity in the Lord's interests, not taking spiritual initiative, not taking the responsibility which they ought to have in the interests of the Lord. The Lord would say this thing to us, not for our own sake, but in order that we may be able to turn to help others out of their paralysed position, where the Lord is losing so much. The Lord would put spiritual responsibility upon us, and make us know that that is our way of deliverance. We may be waiting for someone to come and pull us out, lift us up, put us on our feet, but the Lord says,

“Get on to your feet!” That is only another way of saying, “This is a matter for you!” Do not wait till someone comes and lifts you up and puts you on your feet, and becomes a crutch for you. Oh, this devastating leaning upon others! What loss there is! It does not glorify God. Believe me, the Lord will leave you where you are until you face this thing. You wait and pray, and agonise in prayer, and break your heart, and the Lord will still leave you where you are. He will say to you, “Take responsibility! Take initiative!” Your trouble is that you lack this spiritual initiative, and it is a kind of infantile paralysis! It is a mark of your spiritual immaturity, and you have to exercise yourself towards God.

When the Lord is making spiritual leaders, He very often cuts them off from others, does not allow others to come along and help them. They ask the Lord to send someone to help them, and the Lord never sends anyone. They are longing for someone to come to their rescue. The Lord can be the same for you as for anyone else; in Him there is the same life for you as for others. Appropriate His life for yourself, stand by faith in the Lord for yourself, discover the Lord for yourself. It is very important to know that if you are going to be of any value to bring anyone else further on with the Lord. You do not want to go to poor, crippled, bound and defeated Christians and say, “Well, now, the Lord was very good to me when I was in your condition and He sent someone along to pull me out, and that is how I got out!” They will say, “Then we must wait until the Lord does something like that for us!” That is not satisfactory. At any rate the Lord does not do that sort of thing. The Lord wants people who can say, “I was in your condition, and I, like you, was waiting and praying for someone to come and help me, and the Lord never sent; and then the Lord showed me that He could be just the same to me as He was to that person to whom I was looking to come to me. He turned me upon myself, and I had to exercise myself towards Him, and I came to discover the Lord.” That is your way of deliverance. That is spiritual leadership with spiritual equipment. It is of real value.

There are other features of leadership which we perhaps will not mention just now. We must ever remember that one characteristic of a true spiritual leader is always a deep humility born of a deep sense of dependence. A leader is not one of those people who is very sure of himself; he is very often someone who is not at all sure of himself, but sure of the Lord.

That leads us to the next phase of things.

## **The cost of spiritual leadership**

We gather from this book of Judges that those who are going to be instrumental in the Lord's hands in helping others out of their bad condition must themselves have shared that bad condition. They do not stand apart from it, but are equal to the state of things by reason of knowing in their own experience what that state of things means. It is necessary for a spiritual leader to have suffered in the same trials as those being led; to have known the same depths of misery, to have been in the same complicated circumstances, to have passed through those very problems, and to know what it is to emerge from a dark, dismal and wretched state. All that makes a leader, but that also represents the cost to begin with.

We will analyse that more, and deal with it in a different way. The cost of leadership is

### ***a) All that is involved in the transition from the natural to the spiritual***

We have spoken of spiritual understanding. There must be, then, a spiritual transition from natural understanding to spiritual understanding. What is the transition? By what course, by what road, is this transition made? Always through the grave. Before we ever come to spiritual understanding we shall have all our own understanding pulverized, ground to powder, so that we do not understand anything, and we know it. If we are asked to explain we can give no explanation. It is not in us to explain. All understanding has gone. God breaks down the natural to make way for the spiritual. That transition is through death, through the grave. Then presently we emerge, and we are seeing things now from God's side, we are understanding with a faculty and capacity that we never before possessed. Somehow or other a resurrection work has been done; that is, something has been quickened which we never had before. We are made alive to that of which we had no knowledge before. We have a new standard of judgement now, a new standard of values, a new sense of differences. It is just something done, not something which we have created or made. It comes, as it were, to birth, and we know it, and as we move accordingly, in obedience to it, it grows. There is all the difference between natural understanding and spiritual understanding, and the difference is between death and life, and a grave is between. Oh, those dark days, when we lost all natural understanding and there was no light. It is a terrible cost.

We are not speaking about just understanding certain events. It may have to do with trials of a certain nature through which we pass, but it is the general faculty to which we are referring. There is all the difference between a natural faculty for understanding things and a spiritual faculty for understanding the things of the Lord, which cannot be defined, but can be declared as a fact. That cost is the cost bound up with spiritual leadership.

***b) The assurance of understanding***

There was a time when some of us were most sure. Oh yes, we knew, no one could tell us. We were the most sure people. We could lay down the law to anybody as to what they ought to do. The Lord has taken in hand and has ground to powder, made pulp of all that assurance. We have lost all self-assurance. We have come to the place where we feel that we could question everything in ourselves, doubt everything about ourselves. We have come to the place where, when we tell the Lord that we mean to be all for Him there is something inside which says we meant it, but come up against the test and we find that we are not that. Peter was a most self-confident man; “Lord, I will follow thee even unto death.” I am certain that if we had met Peter later on, after the cross, we should have found him a man who would never for a moment say a word about his own certainty or self-assurance. Yet you find the man marked by boldness; there is nothing more sure than his statement on the day of Pentecost; but he is a different man. He has gone through the grave, and self-assurance has been broken in him and replaced with the assurance of God. There is the full assurance of understanding of the Lord. It is costly, but it is the way of spiritual leadership, the way to spiritual values.

***c) Active faith***

We spoke of active faith. It comes the same way. The time through which we pass is a time when we lose all. There are times when we feel that the bottom has fallen out of everything. What have we to rest upon? Faith. Where is our faith? If God is not merciful to us it is a poor lookout for us. If this whole thing depends upon our faith today, the Lord help us!

Yes, these are dark, strange experiences, things you may not say to the unconverted. They are not bound up with our salvation, our acceptance before God. It is another side, the side of our usefulness to the Lord, the measure of our spiritual value to the Lord for the sake of others. The cost of spiritual leadership and a faith of this true, pure kind is borne out of a

grave. It grows like a new child; it is quiet, steady faith in God. You have been through the depths, and you have found the Lord faithful, and you have had to say, "It was not because of my wonderful faith in God, not because of my saying I am able to hold on, to persist! God was faithful to me when I had nothing of faith as far as I was concerned." That comes back from the grave. It is the cost of leadership.

#### ***d) Initiative***

This is quite true also in the matter of initiative. Naturally there was a time when initiative was not difficult to some of us. The bigger the proposition the more we gloried in tackling it, and lacked no initiative in these things. Then the Lord took us in hand and broke all that natural force, or began to break it, and we came steadily to the place where, so far as we were concerned, the initiative left us: that is, the natural initiative, the taking of big responsibility, and we became deeply conscious that we were needing a divine energy to move in relation to the Lord's interests. And now to some extent we do know that energising of God in relation to His interests. When we have no natural energy, when it does not spring from ourselves, and if it were left with us, we should not do it, we would not move, but just lie there, refuse, decline, and yet we know that for the Lord's interests there is an energy which we have not got. We lay hold of that divine energy, and the initiative of God is appropriated by faith, and there are accomplishments.

There is all the difference between that natural go-ahead attitude in the work of God, and that energising of the Holy Spirit; that initiative which is of the flesh, and that initiative which is of the Holy Spirit. You have to pass from the one to the other in a deep experience, when all that is of nature is broken down, and you come on to the ground where it is all and only of God. It is a new creation in Christ Jesus, where all things are out from God, as manifested in the Lord Jesus Himself.

#### ***e) Humility and dependence***

The same law holds good. We may have been very independent or self-dependent, or dependent upon others. The Lord has dealt with all that, or will deal with it in us, and bring us to a place where every other kind of support is removed, where all our independence is dealt with, where our self-dependence is destroyed, where our dependence upon others is cut away. And we come out to a place, through trying and painful experiences, where our dependence is upon God.

Paul is an outstanding illustration of this. There is no character more self-confident than Saul of Tarsus. In the long-run there is no one more dependent upon God, and confessedly so. He said: "We despaired of life." The sentence of death was upon him, so that he should not trust in himself, but in God who raises the dead. The way through is a deep, dark, and painful way, but this is all the way to spiritual leadership. It is all that is involved in the transition from the natural to the spiritual, and it all leads to values for others.

Your value to others in the Lord entirely depends upon your own measure of knowing the Lord for yourself as your very life, your wisdom, your strength.

There may be a little weakness in what we have been saying, that we have dealt with positives rather than negatives. Some are not in much danger of strong natural go-ahead-ness. Perhaps some are lacking altogether in any kind of strength like that, and may be saying, "Well, I do not have to be broken down very much, therefore I cannot come through to very much for the Lord." Do not say that, because your painful experience will probably be from a negative to a positive, not from one positive to another positive. We mean this, that some timid people will go through an agony when God brings them out to take initiative. It is an agony for reticent people to be made to stand on their feet and take responsibility. They would sooner shrink into a corner, but the Lord will not let them get away with that. In effect He says, "You have got to be of value, you have got to count; it is no use your hiding in a corner, I want values in you for My people." Then comes the agony of perhaps having to talk to someone, having to take initiative for the spiritual help of somebody, when you would rather be somewhere else, doing something else. It is the transition from the natural, whatever the natural is — whether positive or negative — to what is spiritual. It is costly, but it is the price of leadership, and after all, it is that the Lord should have His full measure in us, "... each several part in due measure" (Eph. 4:16). There is a "due measure" from each several part.

### ***f) Loneliness***

The cost of leadership is always loneliness. When you are going through a thing in the hands of God, your one sense is that no one has ever been through this before. The Lord sees to it that you do not escape by having someone come along who has just been through it so that you may throw yourself on them and they carry you. The Lord allows isolation. But,

however it is, it is always loneliness. That is bound up with leadership. It is as though you were pioneering and no one has ever gone this way before; you are alone. It is part of the price, but it must be. No doubt you have longed for somebody who has been that way to be alongside of you while you are going through, but the Lord has not allowed it. We say in effect, "If only we had their experience in this thing to appeal to!" But somehow or other the Lord cuts it all off from us, and takes us through with Himself alone. If we refuse to go through with Him alone we are going to miss the Lord's object.

### ***g) Misunderstanding***

So often accompanying the loneliness is misunderstanding, and that is the more bitter side. It is the more positive or active side. Think of Nehemiah. He had to take the lead, the initiative. But it was not long before not only in his loneliness, but in misunderstanding and misrepresentation he discovered the cost of that leadership. All around things were being said: "He is building this thing to make himself a name! He is going to appoint prophets to preach about him! He is starting a new movement!" All the things which were said were lies, false; it was misrepresentation, misunderstanding. That is simply because a man or woman has come to know the will of God as it applies to them, and they are going on in that way of God.

It is strange how people will very rarely give another credit for walking with God. Others always seem to interpret their movements as though they had been captured and led astray. They never give them credit for really walking with God themselves. They blame someone else, and then blame them for getting into the hands of someone else. It is a part of the price.

### ***h) Selflessness***

It is necessary when counting the cost of leadership to be selfless and disinterested in the matter. Leaders may labour for perhaps another generation, for others to enter into their labours, and they may never see the fruit of their own labours.

Look back over the history of all who have really been used of God in the lives of His people. Very rarely has their life borne fruit until they have gone. They have laboured, and other men have entered into their labours. It means that there is to be no present glory, nothing for self, no present reward. It is a Moses leading through the wilderness, up against

the real hard, tough side of things, and then passing out without seeing the fruit. That is the price of leadership so often; selfless disinterestedness, being willing to labour, to give one's life, to suffer, to come to a place of value for others and never see the full result of it.

That is all we shall say for the time being. It has all come out of that expression of Deborah: "For that the leaders took the lead in Israel". That is the explanation of such deliverance, of a mighty emancipation, of glorious victory, the changing of the whole face of things from servile slavery, depression and oppression, to ascendancy, liberty and progress.

Do remember, again, that this is spiritual and not official; it has nothing to do with persons as such. It is a spiritual condition which the Lord would find in us all.

## **THE PATHWAY TO AND THE NATURE OF USEFULNESS TO THE LORD**

*Reading: Judges 6:11-40; 7:3-8.*

When we come to look at Gideon, we find that he sets before us in a very full and rich way the pathway to and the nature of usefulness to the Lord in this matter of his place, acknowledgment and deliverance.

### **Conscious unworthiness**

The point at which to begin, as being a very important point indeed, is where we take account of Gideon's estimate of himself. The Lord has to bring us to a right estimate of ourselves before He can do very much in making use of us, before we can be of much account to Him. So we see Gideon, and hear what he says about himself when challenged by the Lord. "I am the least in my father's house." That is one of the first utterances of Gideon, and after this story in chapters 6 and 7 Gideon crops up again when his brethren came to him and said "Be thou king over us", and Gideon said, "I will not be king over you, the Lord shall be king over you."

Those two things alone are important, as they are an immediate key to the whole story of usefulness to the Lord. On the one hand it is a genuine, honest and deep realisation of unworthiness in this matter of personal inferiority. If you have not learned the lesson yet, if you are going to be of any use to the Lord you are going to learn that lesson. God will never take you up and begin to make you really useful to Him until that lesson is surely learned. If there is the slightest trace of a sense of personal worth, importance, capability, then it is destined to meet with the constant rebuff of the Lord. It will be broken and shattered like a potter's vessel if there is going to be any usefulness to the Lord. We can settle that quite definitely once and for all. We shall not pass through into the Lord's hands for any

real use until we have come to the point where we say, “Who am I? I am the least!”

That is something more than a pious sentiment, something more than the language which we use as being sincere and honest when we are down before the Lord making confession. It goes deeper than that; it springs out of something which has taken place in us by the Lord’s own work. It is the result of the Lord’s grace, where we know that there can never be anything for the Lord so far as we are concerned unless the Lord Himself takes it up from the beginning and is the life and the energy, the wisdom, and the support of it all. It is not feigned humility, but a genuine, true consciousness of our own unworthiness. The first step in the pathway of usefulness and fruitfulness is that of conscious unworthiness.

How long some of us take to learn it! What a great deal the Lord had to do to bring us there. Let it be understood that it is so. Never let us for a moment have anything in the nature of a thought that there is that in us of merit which ought to be recognised, and that we ought to be given preference, we ought to be put in such-and-such a position, we ought to be acknowledged, or that the values in us should be taken account of. Although we would not put it as bluntly as that, sometimes it comes up in our manner, in our spirit, in ourselves. We make comparisons between ourselves and others, and we feel that they have no right to be where they are, that so far as we are concerned we have greater right. Whether that be true or not, let it be understood that those who are going to be of most use to the Lord will be those who are of least use in their own eyes, of least value in their own consciousness.

So we have here the man who is at a discount in his own eyes, and God comes to that man, “To this man will I look” (I like that little phrase, “The Lord looked upon him”; in the margin you will see the words are, “The Lord turned towards him”), “even to him that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 66:2). Gideon was at a discount in his own eyes.

## **Secret testing**

God’s eye was upon him in secret under very difficult and testing conditions. There is no doubt about the difficulty of the conditions of Gideon’s life. The conditions were difficult in his home; the conditions were difficult in his business, in his work; the conditions were difficult in the land. Everywhere there were difficult conditions, adversity, straitness, opposition, and he was compelled to have a secret life with God. We find

him here as a man upon whom God's eye was resting in secret, while the difficulties were many and everywhere. There was secret trial.

We must admit that God was not unassociated with the trial. It was no accident. The whole course of things proves that God brought about the trial and God drew the people into the trial. The trial was very much in the hands of the Lord; it was intense, and it came upon Gideon. It was secret exercise. He was beating out the wheat to hide it from the Midianites. If you read the early part of the chapter you will see that the Midianites and their allies were pursuing a course of destroying all the crops, spoiling all the result of the tillage, the labour in the field. That was their particular method, devastating the land so far as its vegetation was concerned. It says they were like locusts, and to preserve something from them Gideon was in secret exercise.

### **Secret judgement**

There was secret judgement of the position of the Lord's people. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour ... If the Lord be with us, why then is all this come upon us?" (Judg. 6:12,13). Put that in another way: These very conditions must be because the Lord is not with us. Gideon had weighed up the situation quite well, and said within himself, "The Lord is dissatisfied. This all means that somehow or other we have displeased the Lord. The Lord cannot be with us because of our spiritual state. How could the Lord be with us, and we be in a state like this?" That is the other way of putting it, and Gideon had secretly judged the whole situation in this way. He had said, "This is not the Lord's will for us. This represents something which is offending the Lord, and if things were otherwise among the Lord's people towards the Lord, then the Lord's attitude towards them would be different from this." He had judged the situation aright. Sin was at the bottom of this. Wrong was behind this. The Lord was grieved. You may take it, therefore, that Gideon's attitude was that if only the Lord's people could get right before Him the situation would change. He had an exercise about this state of things because it was contrary to God. He was taking the situation to heart as in the eyes of the Lord. He had God's view of the situation. Now in this secret trial, this secret judgement of the position, the Lord's eye was upon him, the Lord knew all about him.

Maybe in a trying situation in our home, in our business, wherever the Lord has placed us, it may not just be the ordinary course of things.

The Lord may be stirring up difficulties there. The Lord may be provoking things there, making things difficult for us, and His eye is upon us to see what is going to happen. If it is all going smoothly and easily in the home and in the business, and everywhere else, what is the Lord getting in that? Any of us can go out and be very useful if we have no difficulties at all. The Lord must have those whom He has watched in secret, taken account of in secret trial, in secret exercise, in secret judging of the situation with a concern that the Lord's people should have a different state of things from that in which they are, and, more, that the Lord should have a more satisfactory state in His people than He has. The Lord takes account of that faithfulness to Him under trial, in exercise, in judgement, under the eye of God.

God's eye is on us where we are. We may think that we go to business every morning, and meet the difficulties of business life, and people are awkward. But God may be very definitely in that. His eye may be on us. He may have in His heart a great desire to find in us a useful instrument in relation to the spiritual condition of His people, and He has put us there in that difficult home, in that difficult office, or school, or wherever we may be. His eye is on us, watching. He will not bring us out, He will not change things, He will not give us greater service, He will not put into our hands higher privileges and responsibilities until He has approved us in secret. Remember that.

The tendency is the fatal tendency if it were carried out. The danger is to want to get out of it, to change our position to something more suitable to our temperament, to forsake it. That is not the Lord's way for us. Victory, ascendancy, faithfulness in heart in the midst of it, then the approbation of the Lord, and then the call to come up higher. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." What is might and valour in the eyes of God? It does not mean to be out in the field leading an army, but spiritual and moral triumph in secret.

## **The establishing of a relationship with the Lord**

### ***a) Personal consecration***

Gideon had his little difficulty, his little problem, his little controversy, his little argument. Then he needed to be established, assured, so he asked for a sign. The Revised Version is a little more explicit than the Authorised. It says, "Give me a sign that it is thou that talkest with me" (v.17). In other words, give me a sign, some proof, that my relationship is with the Lord,

that this is the Lord, and that my relationship with Him is established. It was something to confirm that he was in relationship with the Lord, that this was no mere operation of the imagination, that this was not just some other person trying to bring him into something, but that it was the Lord.

He went and prepared his offering (the margin is not “present” but “offering” v.18). Do you notice what the offering was? He brought it and offered it, and the Lord said, in effect, “Make that rock an altar, and place your offering upon that altar,” and Gideon placed the whole of it there. Then the Angel of the Lord (who is the Lord Himself) touched the rock and fire sprang out and consumed the offering.

There is a great deal in that. The relationship which Gideon sought to have established, the assurance of his relationship with the Lord, and the Lord’s relationship with him, was effected in the altar and the sacrifice offered. This means for us, that if we have any personal questions about the Lord’s relationship with us, and our relationship with Him, all these questions are answered in the cross. Have you any doubts that God has come in mercy and grace and love to you? Have you any questions about the possibility of a real, living relationship with the Lord and do you want a ground of confirmation? There is an offering and a sacrifice; there are the Holy Spirit’s energies (symbolized by the fire); and there is the altar (the cross). God answers all our questions in that cross. Am I accepted? Do I stand before the Lord? Is the Lord gracious to me? Has the Lord come to me? Does the Lord want me? What is the answer? Go back to Calvary, and there is the answer. God has come down to you and to me in the cross. God has answered all our questions in the one sacrifice for ever.

Gideon got his question answered as to whether it was the Lord he was having dealings with, whether it was the Lord who was having dealings with him, whether the relationship was a true or a false one. It was not by the Angel saying, “I am so-and-so.” He said: “Bring your offering to the altar, and We will answer by fire.” It is that gracious work of the spirit of God on the ground of the offering of Christ which is the witness to our hearts that the Lord has come, and the relationship is established.

The Lord always works on that basis. We stand and ask the Lord all sorts of questions as to our standing and acceptance with Him, and He never gives us a specific answer. He says, “Come back to Calvary, take another look at that. That is the proof of My love for you, My grace towards you, My acceptance of you, that I have come down to you, that the relationship with Me is a living and a true one.” Calvary is the answer.

The altar answers all the questions. The cross is God's means of proving that He is come down for the deliverance of His people. "Come thou therefore and I will send thee", said the Lord to Moses. That might be taken right over to Gideon. The cross, the altar, is the declaration that the Lord has come down to deliver. Now on the ground of the cross our relationship with the Lord is established.

Nothing affected that afterwards; it was established. There were no more questions of relationship. The sign later on was not a question of relationship at all. This was a question of relationship, that it was the Lord with whom he was having dealings. That was settled. You and I must have that question settled, the question of our acceptance with the Lord and the Lord having come to us in grace for deliverance. Let it be settled once and for all, as definitely, as fully and finally as the work of Christ in His cross. Having got that settled once and for all, and standing upon that blessed ground of assurance, it is clear that Gideon capitulated his life to the Lord. The act of complete surrender and consecration to the Lord was bound up with that altar. The offering was Gideon himself in type, joined to the Lord. He is accepted on that ground.

### ***b) Consecration of the home***

Following that act of complete consecration, the next thing was the evidence of it in his own home. All we are going to say about that is that the home is the place where the testimony must start. The home must be the starting place of the testimony. That is not just testimony to salvation. If you have not borne your testimony to your salvation in your own home you may take it that the Lord is not going to lead you out into usefulness somewhere else. But we are speaking about the testimony in a much larger sense than just the matter of our salvation in its initial sense. All that we are understanding of the testimony of Jesus, that great comprehensive fact of Christ our life, Christ our strength, Christ our victory, Christ All and in all, has its starting place in the home. Many look for a sphere of service, for an open door of opportunity, but the thing is not established in their home. That is where responsibility before God begins. We shall be paralysed everywhere else if we have a contradiction in the background of our lives. Let those who have it in their power, and are morally responsible to have the Lord's testimony established in their home, remember that this is a vital matter if they can be useful to the Lord in relation to His interests in His people. Perhaps that is the most difficult place to get it established. That means that if you can get it established

there you can get it established anywhere. However, whether that be so or not, that is the place to begin. Gideon immediately turned round to the home situation to have the evidence of his established relationship with the Lord, and his full consecration, borne there.

It is a most remarkable thing that the man who was really responsible for that home, and God's testimony in it, failed in that responsibility. Because of the faithfulness of the son, the headship of that home passed into the hands of the son. The father came under the son. The father put his son forth as though he were now in charge of the situation. Morally and spiritually the headship passed to the son. It came under the Lord by means of the one who was faithful to the Lord. You do not know how far you can influence a difficult home, and bring down other powers there under the Lord, until in your utter faithfulness to God you have taken your stand. It may be that the spiritual influence in that home will pass into your hands if you are faithful. That is where the testimony begins.

### *c) The Lord as life*

The next thing is the proving of the Lord as life, and the proving of Baal as subject to God. That little phase of the story is worth noting. The men of the city, when they saw what was done, enquired who had done it. They found it was Gideon the son of Joash, and they came to Joash and demanded that he bring out his son that he might be put to death. The father's answer shows that Gideon was established over the father even at this time, "Let Baal plead for himself" (v.31). If Baal is god we will spare Gideon alive, and give Baal the opportunity of slaying Gideon. The Revised Version in the margin states this correctly. Why slay Gideon? Let him live so that Baal may have a chance to slay him. Let Gideon stand to prove the worth of Baal, or for the Lord to prove in the life of Gideon whether Baal is the Lord or whether Jehovah is Lord. If Gideon dies, let it be by the hand of Baal if he is god. So he changed his name, and called him Jerubaal, meaning "let Baal contend".

Gideon has become a personal sign that life is with the Lord, and the power of life and death is not in the hands of Baal. It is gain when a man comes to that position. As a result of a stand for God a challenge is issued to the enemy, and then God and the enemy are brought face to face in that life and God is established in that one as Lord of life over the lord of death. It is a tremendous thing.

That has a very quick issue. It is not something very much advanced. You take your stand for God; you raise the testimony of the Lord; and it

will not be long before you will meet a challenge, there will be a recognition of your action, and then the issue is, will the enemy prevail, or will the Lord prove victorious over the enemy? That battle is fought out in your experience, and in my experience, and the Lord allows that, so that we become, as it were, the object in which the power of life is proven as triumphant over the power of death.

Gideon did not die. Baal could not kill him. Why? Because Baal was not God, and Gideon was on the side of God. God proved His life triumphant over that power of death. The enemy comes in with a challenge and the issue is, "I have taken my stand for God; is the enemy going to kill me? If I live — and I shall live — I shall be a living witness to the power of God's life over all the power of Satan." It is the pathway to usefulness.

Until that is established as a fact in us we are not of much use to the Lord. The people who are really going to be of use to the Lord are the people who have come to prove and to demonstrate the triumph of His life over the power of the enemy, in whom personally that victory is established. They themselves have become a challenge to death, and by reason of their union with God have proved that death is not lord. Gideon earned a name which simply means that he was a personal sign of victory over the enemy. "Let Baal contend." *Let* him contend.

### **Life triumphant over death in the realm of service**

Something has taken place inside of the man. In the case of the man himself something has been established which is the power of life over death. Now the further question is of usefulness in service. So Gideon brings forth his test to the Lord, not as to relationship now, but "that thou wilt use me to deliver Israel". It is a question of service now, and he wants some proof, a sign, so he brings forth the fleece.

The fleece represents two sides of the working of life in a servant of God. First of all Gideon said, in effect, "If I put that fleece on the ground, and find in the morning that it is saturated and all the ground around is perfectly dry, then I shall know." In the life of Paul it is explained in this way: with death all around, death reigning, and being continually in the realm of spiritual death, he himself was full of triumphant life, regnant in the midst of death conditions.

On the other hand, Gideon said, "If the ground all round is wet and the fleece is dry, I shall know again." Paul says, "Death works in us, but

life in you.” We feel the impact of death, we know in ourselves what it is to feel dead, we have the sentence of death in us, yet the Lord’s people around us are enjoying the life through that which we are suffering.

This is the secret of service. First of all, you know what it is to experience the Lord’s life when everything around you is dead. That is an essential secret of usefulness to the Lord. If we simply become one with our environment of death, what use are we? If we succumb to the conditions around us, where is the testimony? The testimony is that in the midst of death we are in life. Then so often the servant of the Lord knows dryness in himself, and yet if you were to ask him whether the multitudes of people round that dry ground in ministry have life, he would say, “Oh yes, I felt dry and dead, and yet somehow or other the people said they were getting such wonderful blessing. I do not know how it is I felt so dry.”

These are secrets of usefulness to the Lord. It is quite true that sometimes when we have felt most full people have received the least, and when we have felt most empty other people have received the most. That is the Lord’s testimony. That is the sign of life triumphant over death working in two ways.

Two more things. The first takes us to chapter 7 of the book of Judges, and it is this: trusting God with an altogether inadequate resource humanly. That is how it can be summed up. Gideon’s army was reduced from thirty-two thousand to twenty-two thousand and finally three hundred, and Gideon was not a bit put out about it. We might have been completely disconcerted if we were working on a natural basis. God said twice over that the people that were with Gideon were too many, that he was to bring them down to the water, and the Lord would test them there. So God sifted out this mighty host and brought the number down to three hundred. Gideon did not demur. He did not say, “How ridiculous! Look at the Midianites and the Amalekites, and all the children of the East, like the sand of the desert, and here I have only three hundred men!” Not at all. He trusted God with a resource which was, humanly speaking, altogether inadequate.

You and I must come to the place where, in faith’s obedience, with a very small instrument, with something very insignificant from this world’s standpoint, we trust God, where God is the great factor and asset, and not the other resource which we have at our command. This is the way of usefulness. Can we trust God in a very difficult situation, when we have nothing with which to meet it, whatever it may be? Gideon came to the place where he really trusted the Lord even when what he had in the eyes

of men was perfectly ridiculous, utterly inadequate. Oh, for such faith that will move out in spite of overwhelming odds which are against us on the human level, because we trust the Lord. It is the way of usefulness.

Finally, what is the secret of power, victory and fruitfulness? It is inward illumination, and the resultant word of testimony. We refer to the light in the vessel, and the trumpet, and the sword. The trumpet and the sword are two aspects of one thing. They represent the word of testimony, the living Word of God as given, but deriving their value, their power, so far as our service is concerned, from our inward illumination. Paul says: "God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). And he goes on to say, "... we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power should be of God, and not of ourselves" (verse 7). Inward illumination of Christ through the Word, and as the result the trumpet blast and the drawing of the sword. That is a secret of power, not preaching out of the Book, though it be the most sacred Book in history, but the testimony out of our hearts as to Christ revealed through the Word. The secret of power, the secret of victory, the secret of fruitfulness — the lamp, the trumpet, the sword.

Let us always remember that to ensure effectiveness the Lord maintains the consciousness of the fragile nature in the earthen vessel, that the exceeding greatness of the power should be of God, and not of ourselves. God reduced Gideon's army to three hundred men, and said it was "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, 'Mine own hand hath saved me'" (Judges 7:2).

Lay hold of the fragment of this word that the Lord is emphasising in your own heart and may He bless it to you.

*(Concluded)*