

From Babylon to Zion

REVOLUTION THROUGH RESTORATION III

By Kip McKean

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REVOLUTION THROUGH RESTORATION III

By Kip McKean

To my brothers and sisters in all the congregations of the International Churches of Christ:

PART I: BABYLON

By the Rivers of Babylon We Wept

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" Psalm 137:1-7

Tears flow as my heart is crushed with pain and anguish at the condition of most of our churches around the world. We are fragmenting as a fellowship. Many disciples are in agony, caused by years of feeling unable to measure up to the "law" and judged as not "doing well spiritually." They have been weakened by spiritual malnourishment, fulfilling Paul's words, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Surely the hand of God is against us for not taking care of the weak. Many of God's evangelists have grown weary and are losing heart because of criticism from those they have loved, served and baptized. In most of our larger congregations in the United States, over half of the full-time ministry and administrative staff have left the ministry in the past year and a half.

God has also allowed churches in other countries to be "torn down to their foundations." For example, 90% of the full-time ministry staff of nearly 100 people in the British Isles' churches either resigned or have been asked to step down. The former 2,000 member flock in London is deeply divided, spiritually damaged and many of the members have been scattered. Like the walls of Jerusalem, the walls of the world sectors are burned and crumbled because of unrighteousness. There has been a reactionary dismantling of the leadership structure of our brotherhood that once joyfully cooperated to finance the evangelization of every part of the world. Congregations, which at one time annually baptized hundreds, are now experiencing very few baptisms. Persecution, Satan's attack from the outside, has rarely caused our churches long-term damage. However, grumbling and bitterness by both leaders and members have allowed the Devil to enter our sacred fellowship and begin to destroy it from within.

Though the issue of church "autonomy" obviously needs much discussion, study, and prayer, the decision at the November 2002 Unity Meeting in Los Angeles for the world sectors to operate individually has resulted in the dismantling of a central leadership. In the ensuing months, many of our individual congregations have likewise declared their own autonomy. The implementation of these decisions has already reaped disastrous results on the mission field. Funding for third world churches in many places has sharply decreased or is no longer available.

In most places the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) are no longer an advancing, growing movement of God. Collectively, we are not moving; we are in retreat. Many disciples are appalled to see their fellowship turning lukewarm and complacent --resembling the churches many of them came out of to become true disciples. People are watering down, and in some cases, totally abandoning basic Bible principles of discipleship due to the hurts resulting from "one sinner discipling another." All over the world there are situations where vocal Korah-like grumblers are allowed to blast the church and God's anointed servants.

The beauty of going anywhere in the world and finding like-minded disciples is gone. The dream to evangelize the world in our generation has almost died. Our critics and persecutors revel in our desperation and inner destruction. As Jesus said, "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather." (Matthew 24:28) God has taken the ICOC to Babylon as he once did with the Jewish nation who refused to walk in righteousness. As the leader of the churches until my sabbatical in October 2001, I take full responsibility for the decisions that were made by the World Sector Leader Group while I was leading as well as the consequences of my sins of leadership.

Numerous brothers and sisters have phoned asking my perspective of the current chaos, the lack of growth in many of our churches and what I have learned during these tumultuous days.

Therefore, the purpose of this letter is to open our eyes to see the hand of God disciplining, shaping and molding the ICOC fellowship and us as individuals for his glory. He is far from finished with us. After soliciting much input from evangelists, elders, teachers and members from a wide range of opinions, I have tried to render an accurate account of the events that have led us to Babylon. I realize some do not share all of these perspectives and they are certainly welcome to their opinion; however, I would beg you not to miss the heart of this letter.

Prayerfully, this letter will help all of us to be much more unified in identifying, calmly discussing and then Biblically overcoming the monumental challenges before us. Then, as we gather at the foot of the cross, we will gladly humble ourselves before our Father and one another, resolving our hurts through his blood. The Spirit of God is calling us back to Zion with the maturity that can only come through the suffering and the captivity of Babylon. The glory of God awaits us in heaven. However, we will be able to glimpse it here on earth if we hold each other dear as the sons and daughters of our Almighty Father. God will restore us to Zion when we sing a new song while carrying a new harvest watered by all of our tears of repentance. (Psalms 126:4-6)

My Sabbatical Journey and Restoration

Then [Nehemiah] said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave . . . Nehemiah 1:5-7

At the end of the year 2000, a great Jubilee was held in Los Angeles to celebrate the completion of the "Six Year Plan" as outlined in the Evangelization Proclamation. At that time God had planted disciples in 171 nations! A few months later, in early 2001, one of my children began to

severely struggle spiritually and later fell away. Though the focus of the hour was on my failings in my family, many saw that the sins that hurt my wife and family were the same sins in my leadership in the ministry. My sins angered some of the leaders in the LA Church who felt I was being hypocritical in continuing to lead. The Gempels, Bairds, Johnsons and Kims encouraged us to take a sabbatical (leave of absence) to heal my family and restore people's confidence in my leadership. (It should be noted, some wanted me to step down because of my sins, others felt my family situation disqualified me and others felt we should continue to lead.) In time I realized it was God who was taking everything away from me in leadership, much like Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 4) When my sabbatical began, I no longer had any leadership responsibility. I felt disoriented. Because I was no longer in a position of authority, people felt much freer to share their criticisms. I became overwhelmed by the tidal wave of criticism and very few positives about the impact of my leadership. After countless hours of meditating on God's Word, sharing with brothers, and days of fasting, I now see that several charges were very true, others were partially true and some charges were simply false.

December of 2001 was my darkest hour. The phone had stopped ringing. For the first time I began to realize that many of my relationships existed only because of my role. Graciously, the Gempels were coming from Philadelphia every two weeks to help us, but Bob's health was suffering. Consequently, they could not come again for over a month. It was also in December that the Bairds, who are still some of our closest friends, shared their qualms about my leadership through the years. I felt so alone. The moment felt so dark. The hurt from all the criticism, especially from those I thought were close to me, was so much that I was tempted to leave God; as with Elijah, I felt the journey was too much for me. (1 Kings 19:4-7) But Elena's love for God and words of encouragement helped me to continue to fight the good fight of faith. God was at work, stripping everything away from me so that I would not confuse leadership with my relationship with Him. However, then Satan began to tempt me with sins that I had rarely wrestled with: bitterness and self-pity. Daily I fought to keep my heart soft towards God and those around me. By January it was becoming clear to me why some of the people who were my friends and followers were now mad and angry and were hurting me with their comments. I finally saw that the sins within my leadership had hurt them first and they were simply lashing back. In May, in a meeting with the World Sector Leaders, I went through a very challenging discipleship group where they confronted me on my pride, arrogance and anger. I was broken to the point of tears all that night and into the next morning. I am thankful for their true love. (Proverbs 27:6)

The Gempels and Ewells were particularly helpful with our children over the summer of 2002. Elena and I were able to serve the church in Manila and help strengthen the campus work. In mid-July, Sam and Geri Laing called us to spend time with them. They took us for a retreat to Bald Head Island, North Carolina. In the waters off the beach known as Cape Fear, there were huge, raging waves as the currents of the Atlantic Ocean collided with the currents of the Cape Fear River. Historically this tumult resulted in many shipwrecks. That evening the four of us talked and, in brotherly love, Sam said to me, "You don't get it. This is not about your accomplishments and it is not solely about your sins. This is about you and your relationship with God." We talked late into the night about different ways that God had worked in our lives. We reflected back on Sam's invitation to me to come to the Fourteenth Street Church of Christ (later named Crossroads) some 30 years ago. I recalled my feelings the night I was baptized; I felt totally clean from my sins and free of my pharisaical, lukewarm, denominational Christianity. One of my greatest costs was to overcome my fear of sharing my faith in my fraternity. We laughed when we remembered the day after I was baptized. At lunch one of our fraternity brothers asked me about my baptism. Amazingly, the Spirit gave me a newfound courage. I

shared my faith with him, and by the grace of God he was baptized two weeks later. At the end of our conversation, Sam encouraged me to read Psalms 32, 38 and 51 the next morning for my quiet time. The next day after that precious evening with Sam and Geri, as I went to spend time with God at Cape Fear, I noticed that where there should have been a lighthouse, there was only a weathered foundation. This is what I wrote that day:

Cape Fear Psalm

The rage of the opposing currents
Has shipwrecked my faith.

The lighthouse has gone
And I have no direction.

I am alone for I feel your anger Lord
From your Word and from people who feel like foes,
That used to call me friend and leader.

I gloried in your victories
Which I foolishly called my own.
And now your hand is pushing me under the currents
For I exalted myself, and not your grace.

I am weary through unceasing pain
From morning until night,
In sleep there is a peace when I close my eyes.
But my dreams are full of anguish and darkness.
Because your lighthouse has been destroyed.

I am drowning in self-pity and bitterness engulfs me.
You know that I cannot bear much more.
I fear for your movement.
I fear for my family.
And I fear most for my soul.

I have thoughts of dying.
But realize there would await me
Only an unrelenting, malicious presence,
To be eternally away from you.

My daily tears have been for me,
Yet now they are because I have disappointed you
And have hurt so many through my sins.

Please forgive my arrogance.
I became confused in my pride
And I turned from your wisdom to mine.
I stopped consulting your Word and my brother prophets.

Let my heart return to that simple eternal moment where I first saw your lighthouse.

Through the calm sea of baptism.
I responded to your Word.

I first felt your Fatherly embrace
Just 30 short years ago.

I was indignant at your enemies of false prophets
Those hypocritical leaders of your people
For they led me and the whole world astray.
I was damaged by their arrogance and sin
But by your Mighty Hand, even that first day
You gave me the strength to confront them.

Now I am them. I find no fellowship.
Only angry confrontations.
The prophets I trained are furious
At the damage I have caused your movement.
Few remember my deeds, fewer my zeal,
Only you know my heart.
Father, lead me to rebuild that lighthouse.
If your mercy allows, I will help to rebuild it.

Today I promise you I will stop drifting out to sea.
Today I promise I will swim till I reach the other shore.
I will not quit.
I realize my sacrifice only brought you ever-lessening pleasure
As my heart became dull.
You desire only a broken and contrite heart.
Only these prayers are the incense of heaven.

Today I promise to strive to be only a disciple.
I surrender my ambition to lead till you refine it in the fires of criticism.
I will no longer care what the media, my enemies and even my friends say.
Because this brought me to Cape Fear.

Only your approval will I seek.
My most heartfelt prayer is
Let me and my family make it through the raging currents
Let your lighthouse shine mightily
So we can make it to the other side.

During the sabbatical, God taught me to take full responsibility for my leadership in the kingdom, the decisions of the World Sector Leaders and for the spiritual condition of each person in my family. My sins are clear and grievous. I have been arrogant, almost always thinking I was right. I did not listen. I did not actively seek discipling for me and my family. I was only partially open and deceit came into my life. This led to the sin of anger towards those who disagreed with me. Too often, I viewed these individuals as critical. I did not draw people out. I built an atmosphere in which people were afraid to speak up. There were times when I corrected people that I was mean, cruel and I even humiliated them. I was too controlling. For this I apologize. I am truly sorry.

Another sin came in my selection of leaders. Too often I would value talent and charisma over heart and spirituality. I lacked respect for people with different talents than mine. I also was too slow in allowing the relationships with my young “Timothys” to grow up from parent/child relationships into adult/adult mutual discipling relationships. Another sin was that I failed to resolve conflict. I miserably failed to reconcile brothers and sisters, particularly from the World Sector Leader group, who were in sharp disagreement with each other and with me. I believe that this, in time, led to unresolved issues in the relationships between world sectors and individual congregational leaderships. This allowed seeds of bitterness and distrust to be nurtured and grow to defile many. (Hebrews 12:15)

In Boston the Gempels and Bairds helped us build “family” in the church. However, gradually, in the LA years, my constant short-term growth goals created pressure on the ministry staff that translated to hurtful pressure on members. When combined with a legalistic mindset, disciples were made to feel they could never measure up, too often wondering if they were fruitful or even saved. This robbed them of their joy as disciples. In seeing the need to build a model church, I wrongly compelled far too many good leaders and other disciples from numerous congregations to move to LA. The problem was exacerbated because I did not communicate my gratitude to these other churches, and then I expected them to duplicate our efforts after taking some of their most effective soul winners. For this I am deeply sorry.

Ultimately, my most devastating sin was claiming God’s victory as mine. In pride, I boasted in “my” accomplishments. I allowed people to give me glory; I did not refocus them to God. Though some have charged “growth was god,” this was never true. My goal was, and still is, simply “to win as many as possible.” (1 Corinthians 9:19) However, people developed wrong motivations and stumbled because of my overemphasis on numeric goals and accountability. (Though I still believe in accountability if it is used wisely as Jesus did. Mark 6:30) In retrospect, I see that many leaders did not imitate Christ in me, but my ungodly leadership traits, and they are now being hurt by those they hurt.

I confessed these sins while sharing my sabbatical journey at the Unity Meeting in LA in November 2002; also I apologized that it took me too long to come to these convictions. Furthermore, to communicate my heart, I wrote a letter of apology to the kingdom at that time which was posted on the *UpCyberDown* web portal and was sent to every one of our congregations. I beg your forgiveness again for all of these sins. I am truly sorry for all the hurts I have caused those in our fellowship as well as those who left the movement. **Today, it hurts beyond measure to see the effect of all of my sins, other leaders’ sins and the sins of the people on God’s modern-day movement.** If there is any hope as darkness closes in around us, we need to return to the cross that brought us to the waters of baptism. Only the cross can redeem us and refocus us on our need for God’s forgiveness and our forgiveness to one another. **History reveals that God loves his righteousness more than his movements that become unrighteous; he will allow his movements to die for his righteousness to reign.**

I have gone to our Father and begged his forgiveness. Though I do not deserve it, I know he has forgiven me because of his nature. I am so grateful to be experiencing a personal restoration and the return of the joy of my salvation. Every morning it is exciting to feel a sense of expectation that God will answer my prayers. Moved by the grace of God, my heart’s desire is to once more teach fellow transgressors to turn back to God.

Remember the Height from Which You Have Fallen

During my darkest hours, I questioned whether all that we sacrificed was worth it. I questioned whether God would use me again. As I reflected back on the Scriptures, the promised presence of God, and our own history, I found great encouragement and direction for the future . . .

During the Israelites' wandering in the desert, a young Jewish boy could scurry out of his parents' tent to know the will of God for his people that day. If the cloud of God rested on the tabernacle, God intended for his people to remain another day camped in that place. If however, the cloud lifted above the tabernacle, he knew that the Israelites would pack and move to the place that God directed them. God's will was obvious. Shortly afterward, he would help his mother gather the manna for the meals that day. It was clear to the boy, God was daily taking care of not only his family, but all of God's people. The highlight of certain days was when Moses, God's leader, would speak to the people after he had visited the Tabernacle. Though he was very old, there was an incredible radiance about him. It was well-known that Moses struggled with anger to the point of God's disciplining him by keeping him from entering the Promised Land. However, the boy saw his father deeply respect Moses' God-given authority, so he did as well. The boy loved to hear Moses' booming voice. At dusk, the quail would come and he and his brothers would kill enough for dinner. Night was truly his favorite time of day because in the cool of the desert, the boy loved to sit around the fire and hear the story again and again of how God parted the Red Sea and saved his people by completely vanquishing Pharaoh's army without any Hebrew even raising a single sword. Before he would go to bed at night, this young Israelite would look once more toward the tabernacle. His heart was at peace; the cloud of God, as always, was brightly shining with fire. He felt so secure knowing God was with his people.

Knowing that God is on our side motivates us to do the implausible and the impossible.

(Ephesians 3:20-21) God told Joshua, "*As I was with Moses, so will I be with you.*" (Joshua 1:5) Knowing this promise, he led the people to conquer and divide the Promised Land. Gideon was the least in his family in the weakest clan of Manasseh, or so it seemed to him. God's words to him were: "*the Lord is with you mighty warrior. Go in the strength you have. And save Israel out of Midian's hands. . . . And I will be with you.*" (Judges 6:12-16) This he did with only 300 men defeating 130,000 men. David, in the name of the Lord Almighty, defeated Goliath and the Philistines while Saul and everyone else in Israel cowered. It was obvious that God was on David's side. Jesus challenged the eleven faithful apostles to evangelize the world in their lifetime: "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.*" (Mark 16:15) After the resurrection, Luke records there were only 120 faithful. On the day of Pentecost, God added 3,000 souls to their number. By Acts 4 there were 5,000 men. Even in persecution, the disciples preached the Word daily from house to house. When Stephen was martyred, the apostles stayed courageously in Jerusalem, but most of the Christians purposely scattered and preached the Word . . . even to Gentiles! By Acts 16 the churches that were planted from Antioch had daily baptisms just as the Jerusalem church had at the beginning. In Acts 17:6 (RSV) their critics said, "*These are the men who have turned the world upside down.*" It was obvious God was on their side.

God has always been with his people, "*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*" (Matthew 18:20) **For those not familiar with our history, let me retell what God has done.** Christ's church began in Acts 2 and has gone through many glorious and many dark ages. Throughout history, when the church strays, God begins a movement to accomplish his will. For example, in the late 1960s and 1970s, churches of all kinds were struggling with uncommitted memberships, rampant disunity and no clear mission. In the 1970s, the average

mainline Church of Christ (about 150 in Sunday attendance) baptized just seven people per year, six of them being children of members. Of those baptized out of the world, less than 10 percent remained faithful. Of the children baptized, less than 50 percent remained faithful. At midweek services, less than half would be present. Also, the divorce rate in the mainline Churches of Christ was 50 percent, the same as the world. The mainline church had basically become another denomination with the distinctiveness of autonomy, adult immersion and not using instrumental music in the worship service. They prided themselves in no central leadership. Some of their leaders were convinced that New Testament Christianity had been fully restored. Yet in the early 1970s, one of their own prophets Reuel Lemmons wrote in the *Firm Foundation* that about 5,000 congregations had closed their doors in the previous 20 years. Many members were deeply troubled about the stagnation of the traditional church.

In the 60's and 70's, the Holy Spirit moved through the campus ministries, bus ministries, soul-winning workshops, schools of preaching and other evangelistic movements within the mainline church to awaken people to Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost. I was most appreciative in December of 2002 when Sam Laing, Bruce Williams and Al Baird took the time to have a "life talk" with me. I was challenged on my lack of appreciation for my roots at the Crossroads Church of Christ and all that I had been taught there.

As I reflected on this, I came to a conviction that this was true – I had lost my appreciation for that time. Using Philippians 4:8 as my guide, I remembered and then recorded that which I was grateful for:

“whatever is true” . . . at Crossroads I learned the truth about repentance and baptism to become a true Christian;
 “whatever is noble” . . . the vision to go into the ministry;
 “whatever is right” . . . to follow the Bible no matter what the consequences;
 “whatever is pure” . . . pure dating relationship that built a great foundation for marriage;
 “whatever is lovely” . . . my dear wife Elena;
 “whatever is admirable” . . . the involvement and discipling in one another's lives from the “one another” passages;
 “excellent” . . . doing everything excellently in the church honors God;
 “praiseworthy” . . . the incredible worship services with the focus and great attention on congregational singing and uncompromising, Biblical preaching.

I genuinely believe God brought so many of the people converted in the Crossroads Movement and other campus ministries to the Boston Church and our church plantings. The humility of these disciples to literally leave everything, join us in our quest to evangelize the world, and thus forge one movement still moves my soul. As with the Jews of the first century church, this influx of mature, seasoned disciples provided a constant fountain of leadership that helped propel God's movement to all the Gentiles around the world. I apologize to all of my Crossroads brothers and sisters for the hurt feelings I have caused through the years by not fully acknowledging and appreciating your sacrifices for God.

In 1979 in Boston, Massachusetts, God gathered 30 would-be disciples in the Gempels' living room. The Spirit put on our hearts three common convictions that in time would produce a group of true Christians dedicated to evangelizing the world by restoring the lost principles and practices of God's people:

- 1) The Bible is the Word of God
- 2) In the terminology of the day, each member must be totally committed
- 3) Every member must be evangelistic. This is the mission of the church.

Through the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, in the first year 103 were baptized into Christ, in the second 200 and in the third 252. As the Spirit led us through a continual study of His Word, in 1980 we came to the conviction and taught publicly that the Bible teaches that to be saved, to be a Christian according to Acts 11:26, is to be a disciple. We saw that in the Scriptures, the people who were baptized were those who had made a radical repentance and confession of Jesus as Lord. (Acts 2:36-38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 10:9-10) Unprecedented in the mainline churches, from 1983 on there were more than daily baptisms in the Boston Church that evidenced the grace of God. God was with us.

*The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw **the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*
Acts 11:21-23

Continuing to study the Scriptures, the next conviction that easily followed was: the true church Jesus died for is composed of only true Christians, disciples. In a time when most denominational churches had a membership list that was twice or three times their attendance, we were convicted that God had the same standards of commitment for all followers. Not only should the college converts “be disciples,” but also the teens, singles, married adults and even the seniors.

In 1981, the Holy Spirit put on our hearts a plan to evangelize the world. From Boston we would send small groups of disciples into the most influential cities of the world as Paul, other apostles and other evangelists did in Acts. These churches would be called pillar churches since the kingdom would be built through them. In turn, these pillar churches would then send plantings to the capital cities of the nations around them. These capital city churches would then send churches to the surrounding cities in that nation. From there disciples would be planted in all the towns and villages. When this was accomplished on every continent the world would be evangelized. **Donald McGavran, considered the “father of church growth” among denominations, said that to his knowledge, though churches often targeted cities and nations and even geographic areas of the world to evangelize, no single congregation in the modern history of Christendom had ever had a plan to evangelize the entire world!** Everyone in the Boston Church felt that God was with us.

In 1981, Boston targeted 13 cities *worldwide* for church plantings. The first were Chicago 1982, London 1982, New York 1983 and Toronto 1985. The first three church plantings had over 50 baptisms their first year; Toronto had over 100. It was obvious God was on our side. In 1986 the Holy Spirit sent the disciples from Boston to plant the churches in Johannesburg, Paris and Stockholm. In Johannesburg God planted a multiracial church even though apartheid still ruled the land. Paris and Stockholm were significant because they were our first foreign language churches. Though our critics multiplied, our Father in heaven multiplied the disciples even faster. In 1987, Bombay, India was planted. The sacrifice of the 12 disciples that left America to live in India was so inspirational. They decided to take “the one suitcase challenge.” By faith, each member only brought one suitcase. Also in 1987 the Spirit planted Mexico City and Hong Kong. Our sovereign God had planned through the wars, treaties and sins of men that Hong Kong would

become part of mainland China in 1997. (Ephesians 2:19-23) We sensed our time was limited to plant a church and to raise up national leadership so that by 1997, it could be the pillar church to be used by the Holy Spirit to send out churches throughout the largest nation in the history of the world – 1.2 billion people.

During this time, a few congregations with both mainline and campus ministry heritages desired to be a part of what was obviously not a movement of man, but a movement of God. **(It must be stated here I have always believed there were Christians –“baptized disciples”-- outside of our fellowship. Anyone who has made the decision to believe in Jesus, repent of all his past sins, turned to God by deciding to live the life of a disciple and then is baptized is a true Christian according to the Scriptures.)** I was determined to unify these disciples into a single brotherhood by calling them to leave the dying churches they were affiliated with and come into one of the Boston ministry churches. Sometimes, there was a large enough group of disciples in the existing mainline or campus ministry church that they asked the Boston leadership to send trained evangelists to oversee the “reconstruction” of their church. This simply meant that each member was individually called to be a disciple, and whoever wanted to be one became a member of the newly reconstructed church. In this way, there was then no difference between our church plantings and the reconstructed churches.

In 1988, we decided to select World Sector Leaders (evangelists) to lead the evangelization of each section of the world. This division of labor followed the Bible principle of Exodus 18. Evangelists were chosen to oversee this work much like the way that God had appointed Paul to oversee the evangelization of Asia Minor and Europe. The recorded history and verbal tradition concerning the early church also echoes this idea that God assigned particular “fields” to other apostles and evangelists. (2 Corinthians 10:13) Thomas and Bartholomew were beaten and martyred as missionaries to India. Mark started the church in Egypt. Philip and Andrew proclaimed Christ in upper Asia, and both suffered death by crucifixion. Simon the Zealot preached the Word not only in northern Africa, but also in “early Britain.” Matthew preached throughout Ethiopia and was martyred there. Peter, of course, went to the pillar city for the entire Roman Empire, Rome. There, at his request, he was crucified upside down while his wife watched; then she too was crucified. Also included in the World Sector Leader group were two men who would serve as elders to help oversee and shepherd the group, Bob Gempel and Al Baird. The division into World Sectors allowed us to focus on a particular area of the world in directing disciples to move to and plant churches. It also created a structured way to provide the needed funds to plant these churches.

One of the greatest of God’s miracles began in July of 1991 when 17 disciples sent out from the Los Angeles Church planted the Moscow Church of Christ in what was then the Soviet Union. We endured the government-altering coup of August, which immediately gave birth to an unparalleled hunger for the gospel in each of the 15 new nations formed from the Soviet Union. In our first year alone, God brought 850 people to be baptized in Moscow. Today there are churches of disciples in each of these nations led by nationals. Moscow and Kiev both have a Sunday attendance of about 4,000 people and there are over 11,000 disciples in the former Soviet Union.

In 1987, one of God’s most effective evangelists, Douglas Arthur, called all of those gathered at the Boston World Missions Seminar to restore the Bible principle of remembering the poor. (Galatians 2:10) By 1991, building on three humanitarian projects, we officially began HOPE *worldwide*. Bob and Pat Gempel were given the charge to lead this fledgling organization. Today HOPE *worldwide* is recognized as an NGO of the United Nations. We have hundreds of

projects to help the poor and needy in over 100 countries. HOPE *worldwide* became a highly respected organization largely because of the incredible number of volunteers from the International Churches of Christ and the integrity of its finances. Amazingly, HOPE *worldwide* kept its administrative overhead to under 20% of its total revenues, a performance benchmark used by the world to identify the most outstanding charities. HOPE *worldwide*, because it was centered in good works, shielded God's evangelists and churches from persecution in several countries including even the United States. (1 Peter 2:12) At the King Sihanouk Hospital Center of HOPE in the Buddhist nation of Cambodia, over 100 doctors, nurses and patients have been converted to Christ over the past seven years. Additionally, numerous doctors and nurses have been trained to serve in the medical field throughout this poor country. Truly God's hand is obvious in the work of HOPE *worldwide*.

In 1994, KNN began to help keep all the churches from these varied cultures informed, inspired and unified, particularly when it came to good news about Christians in other parts of the world. More significantly, in 1994, the Evangelization Proclamation was written. In the Six Year Plan, the goal was set to plant churches in all the nations with a city of at least 100,000 population. We had 111 very difficult nations in which churches needed to be planted. To do this required extraordinary sacrifice from the first world churches in America and other nations. In 1979 we gathered in the Gempels' living room as one congregation of 30 would-be disciples determined to build a church where every single member was a committed disciple. By 1985, there were 5 of these churches in 3 nations. By 1994, when the Evangelization Proclamation was written, God's movement encompassed 140 churches in 53 nations.

After incredible sacrifices of money, means and dreams by all the disciples and due to the unity of the brotherhood, in July of 2000, the "Kingdom" celebrated the completion of the Six Year Plan. By God's power working through the church, there were then over 400 churches of true disciples in our fellowship, in 171 countries, with our overall Sunday attendance being over 200,000. From an historical perspective, we should remember that the Restoration Movement in Great Britain and America which spawned the mainline Churches of Christ has existed for nearly 200 years. In 1979, just 15 traditional Churches of Christ had an attendance over 1,000 in all the US -- only one of these with an attendance of 3,000. The largest mainline church outside the borders of the US was reported to have only 500 in attendance. In contrast, by the end of the year 2000 in 21 years, the ICOC had 40 churches with an attendance over 1,000 and half of them were outside the borders of America. By the year 2000 our fellowship encompassed 17 churches with over 3,000 in attendance: Lagos, Hong Kong, London and Washington, DC had 3,000; San Diego, San Francisco, Moscow, Kiev and Johannesburg had 4,000; Chicago, Sao Paulo and Mexico City, 5,000; Atlanta and Manila 6,000; Boston 7,000; New York 11,000 and Los Angeles 15,000. Our individual congregations were beginning to approach the size of New Testament churches of 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000 disciples that Alvin Jennings wrote about in his book *The 3 R's of Urban Church Growth*. Few will ever forget the Rose Bowl service in LA of 17,000 and the 100,000 in attendance for the HOPE *worldwide*-centered service in Manila. We should all stand in awe of God and his grace for the unprecedented geographic expansion of churches and the phenomenal number and diversity of souls he saved in such a short period of time. In the *History of the International Church of Christ*, Foster Stanback contrasted our efforts with other "Christian" groups calling it, "...one of the greatest missionary efforts ever made in the history of the Christian church."

Each disciple is a miraculously changed life that shows the evidence of God's grace. Paul shares that the mystery of the gospel was the uniting of the Jew and Gentile in Christ. (Ephesians 2)
This same grace made us a movement of God and bonded us beyond our cultural, racial

backgrounds and national boundaries, uniting Jew and Arab, Russian and American, Korean and Japanese, the Hutu and the Tutsi, black and white, young and old, and even male and female. (Galatians 3:26, 27) Always, our goal was to eventually raise up “national leadership.” Amazingly, our love for God and our unity was so strong that often the father of faith, the church planting evangelist, was of a nationality that was despised in that country. We also can easily forget how God’s grace has saved our marriages. Though there have been a few scattered divorces, mostly because of the sin of adultery, if you are married in our fellowship of churches and remain as faithful disciples, your marriage is almost assured of fulfilling the vow “until death do us part.” This can only be explained by our zealous commitment first to God, then to our spouse and, not to be forgotten, through the Spirit’s help by the discipling from other married couples.

In praise of all these glorious accomplishments of God, many Christians were moved by the Spirit to write congregational hymns, spiritual songs, anthems and musicals (such as *UpsideDown*) to commemorate God’s victorious kingdom. The most notable of our modern-day Hemans and Asaphs (1 Chronicles 6:31-33, 39) were Steve Johnson, Sherwin Mackintosh, Dave Graham, Kevin Darby, Brian Craig, Larry Jackson, Robert Duncan and Geoff Fawcett. Also moving our hearts were modern artists who made news, Bible story and family values videos produced by KNN such as “The Cross,” “Prodigal Daughter,” and “Secrets of the Heart,” shown regularly to most of the churches around the world. Also true Christians wrote over 140 book titles published by Discipleship Publications International (DPI) and translated into numerous languages.

We must pause and ask, “Who are we, O Sovereign Lord, that you have brought your movement, the churches and our families so far?” And yet, tares of bitterness had been planted during these incredibly fruitful years among this harvest of the nations. Into the hearts of the leaders and members came weariness in evangelism, disappointment in role, lost kingdom dreams, fuzziness in doctrine, starvation for mature teachings, compulsion to financially sacrifice, and over all, because of shallow discipling, a numbness caused by an emphasis on external behavior over the heart. There was also a growing distance and distrust between the full-time ministry people and those with secular jobs. These were the seeds Satan planted that would begin to destroy what God had obviously built. **We severely underestimated Satan’s counterattack on our brotherhood, given God’s freeing so many from the gates of Hell.**

In Joshua 5 there is a most intriguing account. Joshua and the Israelites are camped near Jericho when Joshua encounters a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua challenges him, “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*” To Joshua’s surprise, the man replies, “*Neither...But as commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come.*” In reverence, Joshua falls face down to the ground and asks what message God has for him. In the ensuing instructions, the angel tells Joshua how to conquer Jericho. As God’s family, we have seen the miracles of God and rightly assumed God is with us. This is reinforced by reading about the great men and women of faith in the Bible and how they completed God’s mission when they held to the promise of God, “*I will be with you.*” However, Joshua 5 has made me pause – and for good reason. **The real issue is not, “Is God on our side?” but rather, “Are we on God’s side?”** We became enamored with “God is on our side” and lost the focus of seeking to remain on God’s side. It’s obvious that we are in an era in which we have drifted away from God and his Word just as in the days after Joshua died. In the book of Judges, the Israelites were hurting because “*In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit.*” (Judges 17:6 and 21:25) These two passages refer to times in the book of Judges when Israel had no judge, no central leadership. (From an historical perspective, they did not yet have a human king. This was

recorded in 1 Samuel.) The main point was that God was not reigning in Israel. Therefore, Israel fragmented and the miracles of Moses and Joshua's time disappeared.

God was still sovereign. God was still in control. God still loved his people. God's passion for his righteousness caused him to discipline, in love, his unrighteous movement. This same principle was again seen after the glory days of King Solomon. The kingdom divided. Assyria swept Israel into captivity in 722 BC. And a little more than a century later, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the walls of Jerusalem, destroy the temple of God, and to take Judah into captivity in Babylon. There over a period of seventy years, the Hebrews were refined and the Spirit gathered a remnant which he brought back to Jerusalem (Zion) to reestablish the Temple and the now purified nation of Israel.

Reaffirming God's Revealed Truth

At this current hour in God's kingdom, false teachers masquerading as angels of light are preying upon misguided, bitter disciples. With half-truths, these teachers have not only undermined the integrity and thus the authority of leadership, particularly evangelists, but also have introduced disruptive false doctrines that have been embraced by insecure congregational leaderships. We can no longer take our fragile brotherhood for granted. This is a time when we need to dig into our Bibles to reaffirm our basic convictions about the Bible and the Biblical commands and principles that have guided God's movement. We should also be excited that we have so much more to learn at this hour. **We need to learn to separate principles, which are truths of God, from methodologies which are man's way (opinion) implementing these eternal truths. To strengthen our brotherhood, individually and collectively we need to affirm these God-given truths:**

- 1) **Jesus is the only way of salvation.** (Acts 4:12) The Bible in Romans 2 & 3 teaches that the whole world is lost. The Jew (one who has the Bible) is lost because he does not measure up to the perfection of the law. And the Gentile, (one who does not have access to the Bible) is lost even though he is not judged by the law (the Bible). He is going to be judged by his conscience, and since no one will perfectly live up to their conscience, both the Jew and the Gentile fall short and only Jesus can reconcile man to God. Therefore, our message must be Jesus Christ and him crucified, if God's movement is to impact all nations, all cultures, all ethnic groups and all religions. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
- 2) **The Bible is the inspired Word of God.** (2 Timothy 3:16) Many evangelists, elders and teachers, whose roots are in the mainline Church of Christ, at this hour would have us only focus on the New Testament. (This is the primary focus of the traditional Churches of Christ.) In fact, we are a Bible movement. We need to search the principles of leadership in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.
- 3) **Every person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.** (Ephesians 2:8,9) To accept this grace and become a true Christian, each person must believe in Jesus as the resurrected Son of God, repent of his or her sins, make the decision to be a disciple and then be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have chosen to most often refer to Christians as disciples since the terms "Christian" and "believer" have become so undefined.

- 4) **God adds the baptized disciple to his church universal.** (Acts 2:41) The church universal is all of the disciples in the world that God sees when he looks down from heaven into people's hearts, whether they are in the ICOC, mainline Church of Christ, the Christian Church, in breakaway small groups or a single disciple in a denominational church. However, we have tried to use God's standards in building the visible church, in which each congregation should be composed of only baptized disciples.
- 5) **God's ultimate commands for each disciple are to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.** (Matthew 22:34-37) It is so important to remember that being a disciple does mean a total commitment to God. But first and foremost, to be a disciple is to be a son of God, to have a deep, emotional, personal relationship with God.
- 6) **As Jesus called the 11 faithful apostles to evangelize all nations, each succeeding generation receives the Great Commission to evangelize the world in their generation.** (Matthew 28:16-20) Because of our love for God and our fellow man, each of us must accept Jesus' Great Commission to go, make disciples. Therefore, collectively, the mission of the church is to seek and save the lost because the church is the body of Christ on earth. (Luke 19:10) Some have questioned whether it is God's command to go to "every nation in a generation." Literally in the Greek text of Matthew 28, Jesus commanded the 11 apostles to "disciple and then baptize all nations." Implicit in this, is that this command would be obeyed within their lifetime, a generation. They were to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Then the question comes, "Does the Bible explicitly record the baptizing of disciples?" In John 4:1, Jesus' apostles baptized disciples, and we are to do likewise.
- 7) **Every disciple must be disciplined by God, by the Scriptures and by man.** God is sovereign and disciplines us through our experiences of both victory and defeat. (Hebrews 12:1-15) The Scriptures disciple us and mature us as we learn to obey them more and more. (Hebrews 5:11-14) Jesus exemplified discipling in his relationships with the apostles and then commanded discipling not only to become a Christian, but also after baptism ... "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20) Though the methodologies of discipleship partners, prayer partners, discipleship groups, as well as the changing nature of the discipling relationship as disciples mature from being a parent / child to adult / adult may all be debated, being disciplined is an absolute command of God and makes God's true movement distinctive.
- 8) **Remember the poor.** Through our personal sacrifice, local congregations and through HOPE *worldwide*, like Paul, we have been eager to remember the poor. (Galatians 2:10)

These principles were restored or reaffirmed over the last 24 years. It has been stated, "Those who forget about the past are condemned to repeat it." **I think in retrospect, over the last few years, like so many other Christian renewal movements, we lost our spirit of continual restoration of the Bible.** This led to a stagnation of the heart, among both leaders and members. . . "after beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law or because you believe what you heard?" (Galatians 3:3-5) What once was a joyous sacrifice for missions became a burdensome missions contribution multiple given under compulsion. What once was the spirit of a disciple to go anywhere, do anything, give up everything, in time became the same behavior without the heart. What once was charitable Christian advice and direction became

authoritarian dictates which sometimes violated the consciences of the recipients, thus causing resentment and anger. There were other definitively sinful occasions when a discipleship partner or a leader would require a person to obey their opinion with the only apparent option being to leave the church and thus, in their minds, be condemned to hell. Others felt disrespected in the way the leaders interacted with them, not changing the nature of the relationship of the leader and follower as they both matured in Christ. But the question remains, why do some individuals show so much mistrust and animosity towards some of the same leaders who had taught, baptized, disciplined and married them? Our heroes, those who risked their health and even received death threats because of the gospel, are openly barraged with sharp, hateful criticisms and doubts about their sincerity and motivation.

Many have concluded the reason for all of this sin, disorder and bitterness was “the system” – World Sector Leaders, discipleship partners, Bible Talks, megachurches, the “Study Series,” etc. (Some have even gone so far as to call it the “evil” system.) A system is simply applying Biblical principles to create methods. Some churches in the name of “freedom in Christ” have abandoned all methodologies such as Bible Talks, discipleship partners, etc. We must have a system that uses Biblical principles in order to evangelize the world. A “new system” would be fine, but the rejection of these methodologies, leaving no system at all has led to the rejection of the Biblical principles of discipling individuals, discipling churches, building brotherhood and world evangelism. In my opinion, systems do not sin. We, as people, sin against God and one another. (Mark 7:21-23)

For years, I have felt misunderstood about the phrase “modern-day movement of God.” Movement implies growth numerically and expansion geographically. In our case, expansion is centered in the mission of God, which is that all men everywhere should have the chance to be saved. (1 Timothy 2:3-4) When growth and expansion are no longer taking place, a group of churches ceases to be a movement and simply becomes a fellowship. An individual can still be a disciple, be saved and be a member of a church with many disciples in it, but they may not be a part of a movement. If the collective churches of which one is a member do not grow over a period of time, those churches will likely become lukewarm, will cease to be a movement and die. In our movement, there was always a time when some churches were not growing, but the churches as a whole were baptizing and planting other churches. When churches were struggling, we tried to give them special attention to help them “turn it around” just as we would help an individual who was struggling. A disciple or a church may go through a period without growth, but over time will either grow or die. Our churches are in Babylon and, for the most part, the movement has stopped. **The question must be asked, “Are we the movement of God, or at least a movement of God, or have we become simply a fellowship of saved disciples?”**

How Did We Get To Babylon?

Most of us feel the overall condition of our churches is not where God wants them to remain. The question comes, “How did we get here?” **Each of us must take full responsibility for our literally countless sins of commission and omission.** As for me, two years ago when one of my children fell away, for the first time I became aware that some of the World Sector Leaders seriously doubted my leadership. In retrospect, I now realize that in the preceding years, there had been many unheard or unregistered qualms which had now grown into these serious doubts. These doubts opened the door for past hurts to surface, particularly caused by those times I had not been the kind of leader that Jesus would have had me be. So many emotions come when we see our mentor and model so human, so flawed.

At this time as well, many of the leaders, particularly the Kingdom Teachers and World Sector Elders, developed the opinion that qualifications to be an elder and overseer (1 Timothy 3) should be bound on the World Sector Leaders and their leader, since they were to be “over elders.” (The World Sector Leaders were originally selected because of their walk with God and their abilities as an evangelist – preacher, church builder, trainer of men and visionary. Some did not even have children when they were selected because this is not a biblical requirement to be an evangelist.) Many of the Kingdom Teachers and World Sector Elders came to the specific opinion that each World Sector Leader would be disqualified from his role if one of his children was not a faithful disciple. Therefore, I needed to step down from the role of leading the movement.

Interestingly, later when his children struggled, Marty Wooten, one of the Kingdom Teachers, quickly felt people’s harsh, judgmental condemnation at this most difficult and hurtful time. He experienced first hand that to take the leader totally out of responsibility destabilized many Christians and also worsened his entire family’s life. He now believes that if an evangelist or teacher falls short in his family and repents, he can and should continue to lead as many great leaders had similar challenges such as David, Samuel and Aaron. He has also pointed out that elders who sin are not automatically disqualified, but should be rebuked publicly (1 Timothy 5:20). (Of course, there are situations of sin in which an elder or any leader should step down.) Through all of this, Marty and I have become close brothers praying for our families and the kingdom. Some have asked me to remove Marty’s name from this part of the letter because of Marty’s stance on certain issues and conflicts with other brothers. I refuse to do this because Marty is a brother and a friend. I am also friends with those he is in conflict with and am trying with others to bring everyone together. As with all people, including my awesome wife, I do not agree with Marty on some of his views and actions. However, true family, fellowship and brotherhood is loving by accepting each other in spite of our differences of opinion (Romans 15:7) and forgiving each other’s sins as Christ forgave us. (Colossians 3:13)

When I began my sabbatical, the World Sector Leaders asked the Gempels and Bairds to lead the World Sector Leaders’ group. The Gempels and Bairds reluctantly, but courageously accepted their invitation. They could not exercise authority over the World Sector Leaders as each one wanted to “independently” direct his World Sector. (This independence grew out of the World Sector Leaders’ consensus decision in 1999 to allow each world sector to plan their future goals and finances after the completion of the Six Year Plan in the year 2000.) Also, the Gempels and Bairds felt that over the next few months the bitterness would dissipate if the bitter World Sector Leaders would just speak freely without Elena and me saying anything in response to free them from their attitudes. Also, speaking up too quickly can be viewed as being defensive. They had the intention of allowing us, at a later time, to share our hurts. This never happened, but the Gempels and Bairds have humbly apologized for this. Sadly, months afterwards, this became the pattern of how each level of leadership was confronted by their followers. (To be accurate, I had taken this same approach many times. Through this experience God has shown me how wrong and discouraging this approach is. I apologize to all who were hurt by me in this way.)

The combination of independently run World Sectors, the lack of opportunity for the confronted leader to respond, and an underlying bitterness produced by sins within the World Sector Leaders’ leadership proved to have catastrophic consequences. Over the next year, to the shock of each of the World Sector Leaders, many of the same criticisms they directed towards me became directed towards their leadership. There was an incredible amount of bitterness and dissension among the Geographic Sector Leaders, Geographic HOPE Leaders, Kingdom Teachers and World Sector Elders towards them. For the most part, the World Sector Leaders have responded in humility and with repentance. However, with no higher authority ready to reinforce the credibility and authority of each of the World Sector Leaders, their influence in their

groups began to crumble. Their influence was further eroded when some in our fellowship, most of whom had mainline church influences, denounced as unbiblical one-over-one discipling as well as the title and role of World Sector Leader.

In the fall of 2001, two very experienced elders from the Boston Church, Gordon Ferguson and Wyndham Shaw, wrote a book that caused a great deal of confusion. The book was *Golden Rule Leadership*. Some churches fully embraced the book and taught from it; others banned the book from their bookstores. Upon reading the book, some felt the strong, charismatic leader was very much discredited as not being like Jesus, though I do not think that was the intention of the authors. I agree that harsh, authoritarian, “one-man-show” leadership can be very hurtful to a church. I am confident that all of us agree that leaders need to practice the golden rule, “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*” as they lead. Jesus was very strong in his command that we as leaders are not to “lord it over” fellow Christians. (Matthew 20:25)

Our brothers put before the kingdom a “team approach,” suggesting in the introduction that this would give us more growth in our churches. Later, others took this team approach to an extreme, which has now evolved into having no point person, no “quarterback,” no lead evangelist as a role on the leadership team with the elders. What we can learn from this situation is that controversial thoughts from influential leaders need much discussion and prayer with equally mature disciples before being given to the membership in a book, paper, or letter so that we can reach unity. I have tried to take that approach with this letter, and I am very grateful for all the brotherly conversations, counsel, meetings and emails.

After several years of periodic spiritual struggles, in the summer of 2002, another World Sector Leader, Doug Arthur, experienced intensified problems in his marriage and family. This caused even more doubt, and in some cases rebellion, about leadership and the World Sector Leaders’ competence. There was a growing conviction that the missing element was a lack of a strong elders’ presence in our lives. By the end of the summer, from many quarters came a call to change the governance of our churches. Thinking that stepping down would help unite the leaders and eliminate criticism and bitterness, Elena and I chose to step down the first night of the Unity Meeting in LA in November, 2002. (This was the only section of the meeting that we attended.) Later brothers and sisters shared with us their overwhelming sadness that parts of the meeting became a time of open bitterness and anger. Some left the meeting essentially stating that the role of World Sector Leader was unbiblical, that only elders needed to run the local church, and that no individual (even if he was the “father of faith” to that church) could send an evangelist to another church. The World Sector Leaders stepped down in disgrace and promptly dissolved as a group. It was decided there would be no central leadership and each world sector would be led by a consensus group composed of evangelists and elders. In the world sectors that did not disband, the former World Sector Leaders (evangelists) and those who were World Sector Elders had varying degrees of conflict over who would now lead the world sector. It should be pointed out that the leaders present at the November meeting called for another meeting of leaders to fellowship together in May of this year for the sake of unity. Because of the crises in our churches, smaller regional meetings are presently being held.

When the call came for a new governance, some leaders began to assert that “everything needed to be reexamined” from our views of baptism to methods of discipling to even the dream of evangelizing the world. Reexamination is necessary for a movement to remain fresh, vibrant and alive. However, this reexamination of everything at the same time became an emotional overreaction that caused confusion -- which is a signature of Satan. (John 8:42-47) Unparalleled insecurity came into the hearts of the leaders and members because, in essence, almost everything

in the past was being put down as unbiblical or unethical even though God had used the teachings of the movement to give them salvation as well as tens of thousands among the nations. Few miracles, few past heroes, few efforts were commended or even recognized. It is my personal conviction that some among our number who wanted to reshape the governance and doctrine of the movement were more influenced by their backgrounds in the mainline church than they were aware. It should be noted that Elena and I have not participated in any major kingdom decisions since our sabbatical began a year and a half ago. **However, having learned from the discipline of God and our mistakes, we feel compelled by God's Word, our conscience and our love for the church to make the churches aware of the destructive decisions that continue to be made by some overreacting leaders.**

Foster Stanback's graduate thesis records the dramatic shift away from the Biblical example of an evangelist sending another evangelist to a specific congregation to serve and preach. *"For this reason, I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere, in every church."* (I Corinthians 4:17) This has been replaced by an interview process, as if preaching were merely another job, with an elder/legal board decision-making group:

When the Geographic Sector Leader [Evangelist] overseeing numerous churches in the Central and South American World Sector recently left the ministry, another couple of equal prominence was put forth by the World Sector Leader [Evangelist] as a replacement. To the surprise of the World Sector Leader [Evangelist], the elders and board of the church, seeking to handle everything according to an appropriate protocol, decided to interview the couple first and present them to the church as possible candidates for the job. In the past such a leadership change would have been immediate and the decision would have rested entirely upon the World Sector Leader [Evangelist] rather than the congregation. (*History of the International Church of Christ*)

Since there was so much distrust revealed at the LA Unity Meeting, it was not surprising that when some of the Geographic Sector Leaders returned to their home congregations, they found the same mistrust, anger and hurt in their own staffs and memberships as well. As with the World Sector Leaders before them, this level of leadership, also, was totally surprised by the response that surfaced. In retrospect, it is easily understood that they simply reaped from their own people what they, in many cases unconsciously, had sown: the attitude of mistrust of those who led and disciplined them. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Some church leaders opted for complete autonomy, thinking that this would "protect" them from being further hurt in discipling relationships. **I have learned that autonomy is defined differently by brothers that I deeply respect. I shall define an autonomous congregation as one that is totally void of any influence, direction and authority from any other church or individual. (This is the practice of the mainline Churches of Christ.)** Therefore, autonomy is inherently disunity, the antithesis of brotherhood. Many of my brothers, though, use the word "autonomy" to describe the maturing of a church that needs less outside influence when a group of mature men now lead the church. I agree with this concept. However, in my opinion, we should not confuse maturity and a growing independence with autonomy. As a child matures, he needs less and less direction, but in a healthy family, he will always maintain his relationships. Even as mature adults, we all need individuals who challenge our thinking whether they are family members or not. This is the desire of all who seek God and seek discipling.

Though no one would dare breathe these words, the desire for autonomy in some is the desire to have their own kingdom. This is where the mainline Church of Christ preachers, though I believe many were good-hearted, went astray. Because there were no other evangelists or elders overseeing their work, with no one in their lives, many gave in to the temptation to compromise their zeal, compromise the Word of God and/or compromise their purity. Romans 13 teaches that all authority (someone over you) is from God, and is meant to protect, not harm.

Autonomy is not a Biblical doctrine, nor is the word found in all Scripture. It is a spirit of unbridled independence. In some cases autonomy has fostered a spirit of nationalism separating the fathers of faith who had built these churches from their spiritual children. It should be noted that we falsely “gloried” in our movement’s unity. Disunity was sown for years into the hearts of many leaders and followers. This was evidenced in their feelings of suppression that led to the then silent sins of criticalness, envy, bitterness and anger. It was in this atmosphere that Henry Kreite wrote his letter, *Honest to God*. With the central leadership of the kingdom now being nonexistent, there was no “church leadership” to answer. Since the letter contained many elements of truth mixed with misinformation and bitterness, there was an outcry in many parts of our fellowship for a need to change “the system” and many of the ways we do things.

Henry advocated “a time for anger and the overthrowing of temples. I believe that time is now.” He urged churches to have “open forums” which further poisoned the membership towards the leaders as a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. In my opinion, a license to sin was handed to bitter disciples who, under the guise of “freedom in Christ,” often spoke publicly with malice and slander towards the ministry leaders and those who led them. Unfortunately, people ignored Scriptural directives like 1 Peter 2, 2 Timothy 3 and James 3. Even sadder, few disciples stood up in loving boldness to confront these ungodly outbursts. With no central leadership, and the fear that to respond was to be defensive, the leaders, particularly the evangelists, became weary, lost heart and many left the full-time ministry. However, if we are “honest to God,” we must admit that Henry’s letter was a spark that ignited a powder keg of unspoken issues which had hurt many long-suffering Christians in our churches. My emotional, but dear, son in the faith Henry raised several issues that had varying degrees of validity. However, I believe some were simply not accurate. Many members went too far, and instead of having brotherly dialogue, they began to bite and devour each other, destroying whole congregations in the name of freedom. (Galatians 5:1–15)

With the questioning of the “one-over-one” discipling and the elimination of the lead evangelist’s role in larger congregations came the erosion of the Biblical role of an evangelist being “over in the Lord” the churches in his geographic charge, even when those congregations had elders. This paradigm shift caused the evangelists who worked in these fields to lose their personal dreams to do great things because they were now limited to a smaller group in a single city. Another mitigating factor in the erosion of this role came from Henry Kriete’s questioning of the way that money was spent, i.e. the lifestyles and the salaries of the evangelists. He also charged that there was deceit surrounding our missions contributions and the way the funds were spent. This charge was in spite of the fact that our administrators have diligently practiced the highest ethical standards of accounting and all of our large churches are audited annually by the most reputable accounting firms.

Up to this point, as a brotherhood, we believed that evangelists overseeing several congregations had the “right” to expect some pay from these congregations. This was Paul’s point to the Philippian church, that even when he was in Thessalonica, he was grateful for the support provided by the Philippians. (Philippians 4:14-19) Paul saw the support he received as

Christians giving a “fragrant offering to God.” More of us need to view our financial giving from this spiritual perspective.

When most of the WSLs and some GSLs moved back to the United States for the sake of child rearing, those of us in leadership made the huge mistake of assuming that people realized the WSLs and GSLs were still being paid out of the missions contributions, since so much of their work was still overseas, outside of America. In retrospect, I do believe that this “overhead” was too burdensome and needed to be lowered, but not totally eliminated. Discarding this overhead eliminated support for the evangelists who had built these ministries and were still in the process of evangelizing these fields. Decentralization and Henry’s letter caused a reactionary pendulum swing from supporting any overseeing ministers or administrative positions to only supporting evangelists and administrators locally. Emotionally, so many Christians wanted to support only third world efforts, not realizing that it takes overseeing evangelists to direct these efforts.

Alarmingly, our weekly and missions contributions have plunged, not because of the sagging economy, but primarily because of people’s loss of confidence in church leadership.

The drop in contributions has led to the domino effect of even more ministers both first and third world having to leave the ministry because of a lack of funds. Not wanting to support ministers who oversee unevangelized nations as well as weaker churches is selfish. Autonomy breeds not only selfishness in finances, but a breakdown in advancing the kingdom. This is to our shame.

For the first time in the history of our fellowship, there was unrestrained, vocal criticism of the lifestyle and salaries of our full-time ministers. Many ministry families felt the “fishbowl effect.” In other words, every aspect of their lives and their children’s lives was totally on display and open to scrutiny. I do believe some good has come from this upheaval, in that leaders like me have been humbled and have had to look long and hard at the sins in our leadership dynamic, whether they are arrogance, conceit, harshness or whatever. God will bless humility. It should be noted, and I find this sad, that few asked, “What happened to the church where Henry served?” since his letter called the London Church to be “the epicenter of a ‘new movement’ of God?” The evangelist who was leading the London Church is American and his wife is French. Because they lost the confidence of a section of the London staff through their leadership sins, and because they were not British nationals, elected moderators asked them to resign without even consulting the church. Because the new church leaders adopted autonomy, there was no outside authority to back the foreign evangelist and to challenge the people to give the couple a chance to repent. Today 90% of the full-time staff of the church has resigned or been laid off and it is unknown how many disciples are left of this former 2,000 member congregation. **The Scriptures are true that say bitterness can cause many to miss the grace of God. (Hebrews 12:15)**

The Crumbling Wall

*“The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.”
When I heard these things I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned. . . . [Lord,
we remember] the instruction you gave to your servant Moses saying, “If you are
unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations . . .” Nehemiah 1:3,4,8*

Our collective unfaithfulness to God and one another has given him no other alternative but to scatter our leaders, our members and our churches. Truly we are in spiritual Babylon. Before Nehemiah could rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, he had to have the courage to survey the wall and assess the damage. Therefore, there is a need to document the satanic destruction on each section

of the wall of God's worldwide movement during the past year and a half. There are tears in heaven for all the modern heroes of faith whose souls have been wounded or even killed by Satan. Surely all of us have so many tears for the weak and broken-hearted who have lost the Lord's servants who would have bound their wounds. I have tried to carefully record this information by consulting over 50 of some of the most influential couples around the world. This is by no means a complete record of the causes or the results, as there are so many wounded, unknown soldiers who are "known but to God."

ACES World Sector

New York City: Planters of the New York Church, the second largest congregation in our brotherhood, originators of "Daytime" -- "Arts/Media" -- ministries, Steve and Lisa Johnson, true friends, stepped down as World Sector Leader couple as well as Lead Evangelist and lead WML of the New York City Church, but were asked by the New York Elders to remain as an evangelist and WML. They stepped off the paid staff and will now be self-supporting Evangelist and WML. Next generation heroes: Geographic Sector Leader couple (GSL) Dan and Cinnamon Connor and Paul and Summer Sharobeen left the ministry. Vivian Hanes resigned as World Sector Administrator (WSA) since the world sector dissolved and there is no need for a financial planner. Over one half of the staff were laid off or left the ministry. Mike Leatherwood, originator of Chemical Recovery (CR) ministry left the movement. Dave and Coleen Graham, pioneers of the LA AMS ministry --left the movement. Recently Elder Sam Powell publicly repented of open forums and voting, saying, "That's not in the Bible. . . I condoned it. . . It was wrong." Atlanta: GSL couple Steve and Kim Sapp left the ministry because regional leaders did not want a "lead" evangelist, but wanted each region to be autonomous. Jonathan and Essy Lucas left the ministry. The Atlanta Church decided not to collect Special Missions Contribution for Africa. Triangle, North Carolina: Author, second most influential person in the Crossroads movement, former Kingdom Teacher and wife, Sam & Geri Laing, resigned due to "uncertainties over future role and desire for a fresh beginning." Church now wants a "team" of leaders without a "lead evangelist." All full-time college ministers leave ministry due to lack of funds. Sam is now serving as Evangelist in Athens, Georgia. Johannesburg, South Africa: GSL couple Mike & Anne-Brigitte Taliaferro, gallant leaders of African churches, return to US due to lack of funds. They will continue to lead a discipleship group of the African leaders. Mike has been asked to serve as the lead evangelist for the San Antonio Church which is not in the former ACES World Sector. Some churches did not offer him an interview as they want a "team approach" without a "lead" evangelist. Sadly, desperate letters have been sent out from Africa for support.

British Commonwealth

Washington, DC: Champions of world missions, planting first non-US church, London, which became the mother church for pillar churches in Commonwealth, WSL Couple Doug and Joyce Arthur left the ministry -- "relational conflicts and lack of funds." Since Commonwealth World Sector dissolved, Jim Blough, leader of the first planting in India, World Sector Elder and WSA, resigned these two roles. Tim and Julie Huffman left ministry. (Leaders in the church purposely separate into four individual churches feeling the metropolitan area of Washington, DC was too largely defined. I do not necessarily disagree with this approach.) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dave and Denise Woods, Lead Evangelist and WML left ministry Philadelphia: Hoovers and Lombardis left the ministry. Staff forced to take 20% pay cut. London: Man and woman of prayer, the Lead Evangelist and WML, no longer serve in these roles. 90% of the nearly 100 full-time people in the United Kingdom churches leave ministry or fired. London Church decimated by biting and devouring one another. Henry and Marilyn Kriete -- asked to leave ministry -- no funds. Former GSL couple

Fred and Emma Scott left the ministry. Church led by Interim Central Leadership Group and decisions made by elected Board of Directors. Birmingham, England: Similar condition to London. Sydney: All full-time evangelists laid off. Prolific author, scholar and former Kingdom Teacher Douglas Jacoby and wife Vicki out of ministry – no funds, forced to move back to US. India: Missions funding dropped 50%. “Scores of long-term staff left ministry due to lack of funds. Indians who left everything in the West to serve in India, now, because of no funds, return to the West to start their lives again.”

Central and South America

Central and South America church leaders asked to continue discipling relationships to grow and mature their ministries. World sector became “mission society.” (“Mission societies” were a 19th century methodology used by the Restoration Movement to coordinate autonomous congregations in focusing their missions money on specific non-American cities or nations.) Orange County Region of LA Church: Planters of Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, and former Lead Evangelist for Mexico City, WSL couple Peter and Laura Garcia moved from LA to Miami to lead part of the South Florida Church due to lack of funds in Orange County. However, instead of being WSL for Latin America, Peter was given the title Evangelist for Latin America. Sao Paulo, Brazil: National GSL couple Othon and Gabriella Neves resign leadership of church, remain in ministry. Over 50% of the staff leave the ministry or are laid off. Miami: Mission team member to Mexico City, GSL couple Andrew and Marianna Giambarba left movement. Orlando, Florida: Abandoned all Bible Talks and discipleship partners.

China

Seattle: Courageous planters of Hong Kong Church and architect of evangelization of China, World Sector Leader couple Scott and Lynne Green relinquished title, but continue to lead China discipleship group as a “partner” to all “the dragons.” Also continue to serve as Lead Evangelist and WML for the Seattle Church. Don Lee, WSA left ministry due to decentralization of finance and administration. Hong Kong: “The church has grown, but very slowly since 1997.”

Los Angeles

Los Angeles: Group of elders and regional evangelists lead the church, “coordinated” by Bruce Williams, a brother of great wisdom and growing humility, and Al Baird, a brother concerned for the weak for years. Presently are wrestling with the need for a lead evangelist; there is no overseeing evangelist discipling or guiding the eldership. Votes of confidence held in some regions to decide whether to retain leaders. Heroes in LA, Region Leaders and GSL couples, Steve and Jackie Gansert, Rob and Connie Kosberg, left the ministry over fishbowl effect and loss of dream. Martin and Carmen Bentley, planters of Buenos Aires, Argentina and Monterrey, Mexico churches left ministry – no funds. Elder and Evangelist in stirring inner city ministry in South Central LA, Anton and Sharon Ivy left ministry. Missionaries to India and Japan, Greg and Shelley Metten, left ministry. Steve and Deb Bowen left ministry. Cecil and Helen Wooten and Marty and Cathy Wooten leave LA Church and meet in house church. Over one half of the full-time people in LA laid off or leave the ministry; many of these were employed in the administration parts of the four World Sectors based in LA. Therefore this number includes ministers and their wives, administrative staff, as well as support staff such as secretaries. Sierra Madre Region – two groups split to form two new congregations not affiliated with the ICOC. Another group joins mainline church. Attendance falls from 15,000 to 9,000. Membership falls from 10,000

to 8,000. Baptisms fall from 2,500 per year to a couple hundred. Teen ministry had been averaging 400 baptisms per year – now just a precious few.

Middle East

Planter of Stockholm and Moscow Churches as well as architect of all former Soviet Union churches, Andy Fleming and wife Tammy give up the title as a WSL couple and continue to disciple the church leaders in the Middle East and lead the West Region of the LA Church. Andy resigned as Leader of Kingdom Teachers in agreement with the November decision that 'Kingdom' titles were no longer appropriate. The Flemings also resigned as leaders of the World Sector Administrators in December. Some churches outside of LA abandoned their financial commitment to help the Middle East World Sector. (“Most churches did not even know that a commitment had been made for them in 2002 by their respective World Sector Leaders.”) WSA Mike Mines and wife Janice left administrative ministry as a result of a decision to reduce administrative overhead costs in MEWS. Bahrain: Lead couple returns to US. Turkey: Lead couple returns to US.

New England & European Missions

Boston: “Board of Elders” appointed to lead the church. Visionary for Europe, planter of Munich and Budapest Churches and former leader of Paris Church, WSL and Lead Evangelist for Boston, Randy McKean resigned both roles but continues as an evangelist in the Boston Church. He still travels to and encourages the churches in Europe and has been given the title of “missions evangelist.” Author, exemplary mother, WML Kay McKean – wife of Randy McKean left ministry. GSL couple & former leaders of Kingston, Jamaica reconstruction, Jimmy and Maria Rogers, asked to resign —moved to Columbia, South Carolina. Regional Leader couple, Bellmores left ministry. Jim and Irene Valiente and Sal and Jen Difusco left ministry. Longtime administrator Paul Pierce leaves administrative ministry. Over one half (134) of full-time staff leave ministry. Eastern Europe: Having risked their lives to plant Cairo, Egypt and Amman, Jordan Churches, GSL couple Bob and Laurie Tranchell resigned, presently seeking interviews for a ministry job. Central Europe: Dr. Dean & Kim Farmer – in my opinion the most dynamic and effective GSL couple in Europe, lead evangelist in Berlin, resigned and left ministry – felt family not financially or emotionally taken care of in the ministry. Paris: GSLs for Western Europe and valiant leaders of Paris Church, Franck and Fabienne Descotes, and all staff laid off due to 60 % drop in contributions. Brussels, Lisbon, Lyon, Marseille, Milan: No full-time ministry staff. DPI is near financial collapse. Tom Foote, Director of Marketing, laid off.

NET World Sector

San Francisco: Innovators of special needs children’s ministries and *UpCyberDown*, WSL couple Russ Ewell, an Apollos for our movement, and his wife Gail resigned from role. Continue as lead evangelist and women’s ministry leader. Schoeneckers left ministry. San Jose Region: small split to form new church. Portland: Lead couple DeGiorgios leave ministry. Small split to form new house church. Sacramento: Small split to form new church.

Northern Federation

Northern Federation World Sector dissolving this summer. Leader of historic first church planting Chicago, WSL Marty Fuqua resigned role, appointed Central Region Leader of LA Church. Dear sister, WML Chris Fuqua becomes part-time, returns to nursing to help with family finances. Reese Neyland, a valued restored friendship, and a man worthy of double honor, becomes Central Region Elder. Former Kingdom Teacher, scholar, originator of

Spiritual Recovery Ministry and former Northern Fed Elder, GSL Marty Wooten “terminated from paid ministry.” WSA Tom McCurry, who from his own IBM background taught me to financially care for each ministry couple, leaves ministry of administration because of dissolving world sector. Chicago: Bernardos, Cleghorns, Boyds, Teeuwens and Denstorffs leave ministry – with these five couples alone, we lost a combination of over thirty years of service in the full-time ministry. Elder Steve Staten at first embraced Henry Kriete’s article and posted it on Chicago Church website. After seeing the damage to the church, he asked Henry to renounce his advice on open forums. San Antonio: Friends Pete and Karen Veloz, lead couple left ministry. Kansas City: Lead couple Tony and Amy Kettering, former missionaries to Manila, left ministry. Church decides not to support Russian missions.

Pac Rim

Tokyo: One of the most noble of the WSL couples and for fifteen years lead couple of Tokyo Church, the largest single congregation in the history of Japan, Frank & Erica Kim left ministry and moved to Denver due to the return of Erica’s lupus and health concerns for their children. Preston and Sandie Shepherd, Tokyo elder and wife, planted Manila Church, left ministry, no funds. Hero and former leader for all Korean churches, Jim and Karen Baisch, elder in Tokyo, left ministry, no funds. GSL couple Michitaka and Hiromi Sawamura left ministry. Rob and Pam Skinner moved to Boise, Idaho to lead church. Bangkok, Thailand: former missionaries to Manila, Lead Evangelist and WML for Bangkok and all Southeast Asia, Jerick and Ally de Perio will leave ministry and return to US in the fall. Manila: Heroes of Vietnam, Ken and Lina Chau, left ministry due to lack of funds. San Diego: Jim and Lyn Fulcher left ministry – no funds. Matt and Brooke Metten left ministry. Over one half of paid staff left ministry.

HOPE worldwide

“Losing significant support from the churches due to cash flow problems in the churches and, in some cases, to a lack of desire to support a separate organization to help the poor and needy.” Bob Gempel, a brother of the highest integrity who has only sought God’s honor, remains as president. Pat Gempel, my mother in the faith, falsely accused of nepotism because at one time her three children and their spouses were all in the ministry. The Board of Directors, which from the beginning was composed of all the World Sector Leaders, was asked to resign. New Board selected. Philadelphia: Bob resigns as elder. Gerry and Jeanie Fredrick leave ministry of HOPE worldwide. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Heroes Dr. Graham and Suzanne Gumley resign as Director and Public Relations Officer of Sihanouk Hospital and return to Australia, their homeland. No longer working for HOPE worldwide.

Media/Law

World sector disbanded. The spirit of autonomy destroyed cooperation to pay “ICOC overhead.” WSL (Elder) and leader of the World Sector Elder group, Al Baird and wife Gloria resign role but continue as an elder and wife in LA Church. General Counsel and his wife John and Emily Bringardner, who planted Bangkok Church, were forced to leave ministry due to no central leadership fund by the churches, thus exposing our congregations to greater legal vulnerability. When a recent article was being written for the Boston Globe, there was no one designated to speak for the ICOC. Al Baird had served as spokesperson for the ICOC. All of the KNN staff was laid off except Roger and Marcia Lamb, former co-leaders of the Chicago and Midwest Churches. KNN was transferred to the NET World Sector.

Though our fellowship has been persecuted for years for our Biblical convictions, we are now disgraced in the eyes of the world – in newspapers, magazines and especially on the internet -- for the shocking truth of our disunity, rebellion and confusion. Angry, accusatory finger-pointing by leaders and members only elicits more bitterness and disgrace. We are all at fault. We must each take responsibility for our own decisions, actions and apathetic neutrality. As Dante wrote: “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a time of moral crisis preserve their neutrality.” Most important, God is weeping. **My purpose is not to embarrass us, but to help us be humbled and broken of our sins through our Father’s discipline that has allowed the dismantling and the burning of the worldwide wall of brotherhood and world evangelism.** I pray I have not become your enemy by telling you the truth.

Roger Lamb, because of his role in collecting news for KNN, sadly observed that those who most boldly championed autonomy at the LA Unity Meeting have been the ones whose leadership, congregations and ministry staffs have been the most negatively impacted since that meeting. Pat Gempel commented recently, “As a movement, we are dissolving. As individual churches, many are disintegrating.” In accurately assessing our situation, we must remember that many of the dynamics that have caused the dismantling of the wall of brotherhood and world evangelism began years ago. When Nehemiah heard about the burned gates and the broken-down walls of his beloved Jerusalem, he wept. He prayed. He determined that he personally would return to Zion to help restore the wall.

PART II: ZION

Let Us Start Rebuilding

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me . . . They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. Nehemiah 2:17-18

Paul was the father of faith to the church in Corinth, having planted the church and staying there two years preaching the Word. (1 Corinthians 4:15) He was also the father of faith to the church in Thessalonica which he planted, but stayed only three weeks. (1 Thessalonians 2:11) As one of the builders of the LA Church and as a father of faith to the churches in Moscow, St. Petersburg (Russia), Manila, Bangkok and Boston, and thus to many of you in the movement, I want to gently encourage you, no longer as young spiritual children but as maturing brothers and sisters, to read the following challenges and test them with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11, 12). **Some, even in this new "age of letters" and openness, have suggested that since I resigned the role of "Leader of the World Sector Leaders", that I should remain silent. However, my comments are not out of structural authority, but out of ongoing family relationships – brother, sister, son, daughter -- created by the Spirit through the water and the blood. (1 John 5:6–8) My heart is deeply concerned for God's honor, for all the disciples in all the churches and for the countless number of lost souls around the world. Therefore, "[seeing] the trouble we are in," in the presence of God who wants all men to be saved and of Christ Jesus who gave his life as a sacrifice for our salvation, I plead with you to make the radical decisions it will take to rebuild the walls of brotherhood and world evangelism of our movement of God around the world.**

I deeply believe God's promise to scatter us when we are unfaithful is balanced by his promise, *"but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them and bring them to [Zion]."* (Nehemiah 1:9) We are close to the farthest horizon of hope. However, recent lessons by Tom Brown and Kevin Mains on the book of Hebrews have profoundly shaped my thinking and touched my heart. This book was written to the church some time before 70 AD because the writer notes that sacrifices were still being made in the temple (Hebrews 7 – 10). (The temple was destroyed in 70 AD.) Most scholars place the date of writing in the late 60s AD because Timothy's imprisonment is not mentioned in Acts (Hebrews 13:23). Therefore, the kingdom would have existed as the church for 30 or so years. God's then modern-day movement had certainly aged, but several brothers in many churches had not matured. **From even a casual reading of the inspired letter of Hebrews, it is obvious the first Christian movement was facing many of the challenges with which we are presently grappling.** Of primary concern, the Spirit addresses the disciples' drifting away from the Lord. (Hebrews 2:1) At stake was their very salvation. The Spirit's solution for this – the most fundamental of challenges - began with a clear call for the disciples to once again marvel at Jesus:

For whom [God] appointed heir of all things and through whom [God] made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful Word. After he had provided purification for sin, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven and so

he became as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs. Hebrews 1:2-4

Then at the end of the book he reminds the disciples to be thankful and stand in awe of God:

You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. . . Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:22, 23, 28

In the midst of all the chaos in our fellowship, with unparalleled disunity between Christians, with so few people being saved, with so many leaving our brotherhood and with all the discussions about church governance, we need to stop and simply remember how great our God is and that there is nothing that is impossible for him. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:7) I must confess right here that when I saw the extent of the crumbling wall, when I felt pain because of my sins and those who sinned against me, I and others began to very seriously wonder if we needed to once again start a new movement that could evangelize the world. Yet the Spirit spoke to me through the book of Hebrews that our God can rebuild the walls of the church even better than before. But he will require us to renew our radical decisions of faith to love him and his kingdom preeminently-- to do anything, go anywhere, give up everything.

In chapter 2, after we once again stand in awe of Jesus, the Spirit calls us to appreciate that Jesus died for us and gave us a "great salvation." Jesus chose to share in our humanity so that he could destroy the devil and sympathize with our temptations and weaknesses. (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15) So we too must acknowledge each other's pain and tears. However, Jesus endured the brutality and rejection of the cross for the joy set before him, the salvation of centuries of lost souls. (Hebrews 12:2) As true disciples taking up our cross daily, we should have this same joy. We should be "fired-up" that we are saved, that we know God and we are promised heaven no matter what is going on in the church or our personal lives. Let us remember - and this should really inspire us - this astounding Jesus, the creator of the universe, the Messiah to the nations, the worship of the angels, is not ashamed to call us brothers! (Hebrews 2:11) Are we in a great family or what?

Grace Makes Beauty Out Of Ugly Things

As we rejoice in our salvation, the Spirit calls us to fix our thoughts on Jesus. (Hebrews 3:1) In Hebrews 3 and 4, unprecedented in all Scripture, an Old Testament verse is repeated three times in rapid succession, thus emphasizing its importance. We are reminded by the Spirit to hear God's voice and not harden our hearts as they did in the rebellion. (Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7) At this moment the voice of God is calling us to completely and unequivocally forgive one another as Christ forgave us.

The greatest need in the world in every century in every generation has been forgiveness which only comes through the grace of God. This is so well described in U2's song "Grace."

Grace, she takes the blame
She covers the shame

Removes the stain
 It could be her name
 Grace, it's the name of a girl
 It's also a thought that could change the world . . .
 What once was hurt
 What once was friction
 What left a mark
 No longer stings
 Because grace makes beauty
 Out of ugly things.

Today forgiveness is paramount to healing a reeling kingdom. Lack of Bible teaching failed to equip our people to know how to resolve conflicts and how to spiritually forgive each other. Over the past few months, church leaderships and significant leaders have written letters of apologies. I commend them for their humility. However, now we as leaders must follow through with our pledges of repentance. It should be noted that throughout the history of the “Christian movements” it is difficult to find a time when there has been the same outpouring of confession and openness of leaders to God and to his people. On an encouraging note, perhaps the only other time of such outpouring was during Ezra’s time in the people’s return from Babylon. **With the widespread specific confessions of the leaders, there is a great opportunity for healing and reconciliation among all disciples and all congregations.**

Since bitterness was unconsciously disciplined through the levels of leadership, leaders must consciously exemplify and teach, and thus disciple, mercy and forgiveness into their relationships with each other and their flock. God must be grieving that many evangelists and elders still have bad attitudes toward those who were or are “over them in the Lord.” (I Thessalonians 5:12) For forgiveness to be a yeast that leavens the whole batch, it must begin with the leadership. Then God’s mercy working through us will heal our wounds and restore those cherished relationships. Having faithfully endured our time in Babylon, returning to build the wall, we will forge an even stronger bond of brotherhood. Over the past several months, Elena and I have been trying to reach out to and reconcile with those we hurt as well as those who hurt us.

Essential to this healing, and to my knowledge not boldly addressed, is the need for the membership to humbly beg for forgiveness from the leadership –for their bitterness, gossip, dissension, envy, disrespect and insensitivity to the devastating impact their rebellious spirits have had on the leaders and their families. When a husband and wife have marital problems, the husband, as the leader, needs to ask forgiveness from the wife. However, reconciliation will not take place until the wife, in equal humility, also asks forgiveness. **Warmth in relationships is the ultimate sign that true repentance and reconciliation has brought healing.** Sadly, several of our ministers have been so devastated that they have decided to leave the ministry because their repentance was not responded to with forgiveness. They have lost trust and want to serve God outside the full-time ministry to avoid the unforgiving scrutiny, lifestyle criticisms and the “fishbowl effect” particularly on their children. Some may serve God better in this capacity. For others, they should have stayed in the ministry. Their faith should have been more like Jesus’ who endured “the pain of unjust suffering because he was conscious of God.” (1Peter 2:19) In any case, countless years of experience and church building skills have been lost.

According to the Scriptures, to grumble and be bitter toward leadership is to grumble against God. (Exodus 16:8) Numbers 16 and 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 show that immorality and

grumbling were considered two of the greatest abominations to God. In the past, too often confession and confronting of sin was a “one way street” between the leader and the follower. This must change if there is to be true family in the church. However, out of love for their souls, members should respectfully confront leaders with their sins as Nathan did to David. (It is interesting to note that David later named one of his children Nathan, probably out of appreciation for Nathan’s boldness and love.) It is also interesting to note that Absalom later took advantage of the consequences of David’s sin to undermine his leadership. Trusted counselors like Ahithophel deserted David. Shimei cursed him and threw stones at him as David was driven out of Jerusalem. David saw in these extremely hurtful, sinful actions the discipling hand of God to change his character. As leaders, or as followers, we must see the discipling of God, even in people’s sinful actions against us. (Psalm 66:8-12)

Discipling

In Hebrews 3:12-19, the Spirit stresses the essentiality of drawing close to one another so that we will remain saved. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that unless we encourage one another daily, we will be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness and we will not hold the confidence we had at first. It even commands us to be involved in each other’s lives daily to the point that we know where each other stands with sin and faith.

Discipling is a principle that exists throughout the Bible. Moses disciplined Joshua. Samuel disciplined David. Elijah disciplined Elisha. In the mainline Churches of Christ, only the preacher, and perhaps a few other individuals, daily shared their faith. This resulted in very few baptisms. In the New Testament, Jesus preached the Word publicly, but he focused his energy into a few. He chose 12 men to be his apostles. **Jesus, our perfect example, disciplined them as a group. He disciplined them one-on-one. And, yes, even one-over-one. And then he paired them up and sent them out on their first mission.** He focused on the few, so that “they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach.” (Mark 3:14) After daily walking with them for three years, he called those same apostles in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all nations. **This enormous, seemingly impossible task of evangelizing the world could only be accomplished by the God-given principle of the multiplication of disciples.** In other words, one disciple makes another disciple; the two of them each make another disciple, bringing the total to four; the four, in time, if they each make a disciple, become eight. This is the multiplication of disciples. If this principle is applied of one disciple making another disciple per year, over a period of 34 years, conceivably the entire world of 7 billion lost souls could be reached. Obviously, not every disciple makes another disciple every year, nor will all the world become disciples. **To me, to evangelize the world means that every person has the opportunity to hear the true gospel of Christ. It does not mean that every person becomes a Christian. (Mark 16:15-16)**

Discipling is how you got saved! It is why there are churches of thousands that did not even exist just a few years ago. To stop discipling people within our congregations will mean that the untold thousands in our cities will die untold. Discipling is not only for the salvation of the lost, but I believe it is the salvation of the saved. All of us, at one time or another, struggle even to the point of disconnecting with God. It is at these times that those who are involved in our lives can rescue us from the fire because of their relationship with us. Discipling is the only way that we can fulfill all of the “one another” passages in the Scriptures: encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:12-13), spur one another on towards love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24), confess your sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16), carry one another’s burdens

(Galatians 6:2), serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13), instruct one another (Romans 15:14), and many, many others. Also, let us not forget 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, “*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are **over you in the Lord** and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*”

When we are discipling another individual, it should be our goal to help them be more like Christ through encouragement, correction and rebuke. **I do believe too often many of us have tried to disciple behavior, and not heart and character.** For example, we have challenged people to share their faith and neglected to challenge them on their love for God, courage and love for the lost. Also, too often in the past a discipler would give advice to another disciple and make it binding on him. That was very wrong. However, to do away with discipling is equally wrong because this is what Jesus called us to do by command and example.

Discipling gave warmth to our fellowship and distinctiveness to our brotherhood. Discipling is the reason many committed Christians from within the mainline Churches of Christ moved to the congregations of the “Boston Movement.” I want to challenge every Christian to search the Scriptures to restore as many principles of discipleship as you can find. **Let us not look down on brothers and churches who are experimenting with new methodologies of discipling. Revolution and restoration are so exciting.** Yes, we will make some mistakes, but having new approaches keeps the Biblical principles fresh as well as continues to meet the evolving needs in a congregation. We all still have much to discover and learn about discipling.

In Hebrews 10:23–25, the writer shows the connection between church attendance and remaining faithful to God. We have become so loose in our attitude about church attendance that we are becoming more and more like the mainline church in which only about half of the people who attend Sunday morning attend midweek or other events. This is not an issue of legalism. This is an issue of the heart. People need to understand that as the family of God comes together, we need each other to spur us on to love and good deeds.

As we mature, we must learn to distinguish between Biblical principles and methodologies. Discipleship partners, prayer partners, friendship partners, discipleship groups, family groups and Bible talks all draw on the principles of Jesus’ discipling, but they are methodologies. Methods are neither right nor wrong; people can use them for good and for evil. But denying the principles of discipling in time will lead us directly back to the mainline Church of Christ as well as to other denominations in which people are not involved in each other’s lives. Some have argued that one-over-one discipling is wrong because people have been hurt, and therefore we should not do it. However, even in the church, we have marriages in which husbands and wives have hurt each other, but we are not about to abandon marriage. We need to constantly work on humility, listening, kindness and forgiving as Jesus forgave us. As our discipling relationships mature, our dynamic of parent/child (teacher/student), will take on more of an adult/adult nature. We must not abandon discipling. We must reaffirm it because it is one of the key ways God changes us through the Spirit and the Word. **Jesus calls everyone to be a disciple. Jesus calls everyone to be discipled. And Jesus calls everyone to make disciples.**

On To Maturity

In fact, in Hebrews 5, the writer says that Jesus became perfect through his sufferings and reverent submission to God. It was so hard that Jesus’ prayers were filled with loud cries and

tears. We are told in Hebrews chapter 12 that we need to fix our eyes on Jesus so that we do not grow weary and lose heart. Everything that happens to us is either directly caused by God or allowed by God to discipline us as sons because he loves us so much. **We, as God's sons and daughters, have a decision to make about the hard times that we have been through: will we become "bitter or better?"** (Hebrews 12:11-15) After the writer of Hebrews helps us understand that growth comes through obedience and holding onto God, he then challenges all the disciples to become mature, to train themselves to distinguish good from evil. The Spirit says those who go on to maturity will not likely fall away. (Hebrews 5 & 6) The Scriptures acknowledge that people will fall away when enticed by their own sin. We need to continue to love these people and leave them a welcome path back to God. (Luke 15:11-24) We must not be like the Pharisees who looked down with "harsh, self-righteous, judgmental condemnation" on those who have fallen. It is equally tragic when any of our brothers and sisters leave because they were not cared for or they were not brought to maturity. One of our greatest challenges is the massive numbers that have departed from our fellowship for these reasons. This excruciatingly painful loss has damaged the faith of so many of us who have remained in our fellowship. In fact, the pain has been so severe, that some have stopped sharing their faith because they fear their new brother will likely fall away. **From the book of Hebrews and from my brothers who have a shepherd's heart for the weak, I have learned that if we strive to care for people by bringing them to maturity, the number of people leaving our brotherhood will be dramatically reduced.**

In Hebrews 5 God says that we mature as we train ourselves to distinguish good from evil. For us as a brotherhood to collectively mature and to evangelize the world, we need to distinguish what needs to remain the same from our movement's past history and what needs to be different. I suggest the things that should remain the same are those convictions in the section of this letter entitled "Reaffirming God's Revealed Truth." As for what should be different in all of our churches, let me briefly outline what I have learned through these suggestions:

What Should Be Different?

1) Of first importance is the Gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:1-5) We should focus on the gospel as the most important thing in our lives and the most important message to preach. We should draw people to Christ, the head of the body and not just the body. We should strive to continually restore Christianity and not "churchianity."

2) The Greatest Commandments are to love God and each other. (Matthew 22:37-39) Based on the most important message, we must practice the greatest commandments to enable us to fulfill the Great Commission. This focus calls us to emphasize heart over behavior.

3) Grace and mercy should be taught and stressed in our relationships – not shame and disappointment which weaken the soul and the spirit. Having been among the weak, yearning to stay faithful, yet with a constant barrage of my failings, I was tempted to leave God. At one time I believed "Strong preaching cannot run off true disciples." However, I now realize the wisdom of the Spirit's charge to the evangelist to preach the Word boldly but "*with great patience and careful instruction.*" (2 Timothy 4:2) At all costs, we must not make disciples feel defeated and hopeless to live out their commitment to God. "*Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble.*" (Psalm 41:1)

4) The Holy Spirit guides the Christian to overcome his sinful nature and live by his spiritual nature. (Galatians 5) We should emphasize God's work to change us more than people's advice, humanistic counseling and, yes, even discipling. (Romans 8) Spiritual growth should be measured by ever-increasing fruits of the Spirit. The grace of God teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness. (Titus 2:10) We should teach a deep understanding of our own salvation by grace through faith and a motivation from grace instead of from legalism, selfish ambition and competition.

5) We should value each member of the body of Christ as equally essential. (1 Corinthians 12) We should care for the weaker parts for they are indispensable. We should also value different talents and abilities and help each disciple find his or her special place of service. We must remind each other of how special we are in the eyes of God – we were made "*a little lower than the angels*" (Hebrews 2:6, 7), Jesus calls us brothers (Hebrews 2:11) and Jesus died for us individually. (Hebrews 2:17)

6) We should teach and expect disciples to resolve conflicts Biblically. When the conflict is due to sin we should obey Matthew 5:23-25, Matthew 18:15-17 and Titus 3:10-11 to reconcile. When the conflict is due to opinion, we should obey Romans 14 and not judge each other or look down on each other.

7) Our purpose should be to glorify God. Our mission should be to seek and save the lost. The two cannot be separated. (John 17:1-5) We should strive not to push each disciple to be personally fruitful, but should stress group fruitfulness through Bible Talks and Family Groups and House Churches (or whatever methodology is chosen) as we sow, water and reap God's harvest together. We should continue to expect our leaders to lead the way in boldness. (Mark 10:32)

8) Our primary motivation should be to please God. (2 Corinthians 5:9) We should not motivate by fostering competition or selfish ambition. Motivated by the grace of Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:9), disciples should give out of the generosity of their hearts, not under compulsion. Evangelism should be motivated by gratitude for the grace we have received and the love for the lost that Jesus showed us – motivated by the forgiveness of sin instead of the shame of it.

9) Appropriate preaching of the Word – milk for young Christians and solid food for those who are maturing. I would like to encourage each congregation to develop a new study series to help us more effectively teach non-Christians, encompassing the changes listed above. These studies should be reviewed from time to time to keep them as fresh tools and to keep them from becoming law and ritual. The study series, of course, would be taught to non-Christians. However, they are also great tools for new Christians, to solidify, unify and multiply. In addition, teaching of the mature Christians should not be with the milk (the first principles), but with the solid food of the Word to produce maturity. (Hebrews 5:12-14) Our evangelists and elders should be taught more thoroughly the deeper truths of the faith from the Scriptures.

10) Servant, Jesus-like leadership should be the standard for all levels of responsibility. Leaders should not "*lord it over them*" but should lead in approachable humility. (Matthew 20:24 – 28, Philippians 2:1-8) In response, the Christians should "*respect those who work hard among [them] and are over them in the Lord.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:12) Knowing their leaders will respectfully listen to their thoughts and opinions, the people should easily support the leader's final decisions which should be come only after prayer, counsel and adjustments made because of

the valued input of the people. This is the dynamic that produces unity between a husband and a wife.

New Testament Movement or Bible Movement?

In Hebrews 6 the Spirit reminds us that the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament. Incredibly, we are the heirs of God's promises to Abraham. Remember, God's ultimate promise and our ultimate hope is heaven. This is our "*anchor for the soul which is firm and secure.*" (Hebrews 6:19) I believe we need to talk so much more about heaven and that our sacrifices here are nothing compared to the glory that awaits us. **All of our sacrifices are more than "worth it."** This forward expectation of faith will help us to simply believe the other promises of God and obey his commands. In fact, in the book of Hebrews, to believe is to obey; to not obey is equated with unbelief. (Hebrews 3:19)

Let me digress for a moment. Throughout Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament, the Spirit shows how the Old Testament and the New Testament are knit together for us to understand God's purposes. (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11) Christ and the teachings of the apostles and the prophets are the unchangeable foundation of the church. (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20) In most traditional Churches of Christ, the focus of trying to understand God's will was largely focused on the New Testament with a feeling that the Old Testament is no longer a pattern for anything. Secondly, the mainline church largely believes that in order for something to exist, we should "speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." Interestingly, the two other branches of the Restoration Movement in America were the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Churches. Their view of scriptural interpretation is the one I agree with: **if the Scriptures do not prohibit something, it is allowable.** (1 Corinthians 10:23-24)

From the early days in Boston, we embraced the principles of both the Old and the New Testaments, realizing that the old law was fulfilled in the new law of Christ through the cross. The principles of the Old Testament were the same principles of the New Testament Church because that was their Bible. (Jews were the only members of the church for the first seven years of its existence.) We believe that we should "be silent where the Bible speaks and speak where the Bible is silent." In other words, if the Bible does not specifically prohibit something, then it is fine if it accomplishes God's will or does not cause brothers to stumble. (1 Corinthians 10:31-32) For example, the New Testament does not talk specifically about a deaf ministry, a CR (Chemical Recovery) ministry or an AMS ministry. But I am sure God is pleased that we have a ministry that reaches out to deaf people, those with chemical addictions and those who are artists. (Let me say here, for the past few years I have fully supported and been in awe of God's miracles in the CR ministries. My early reservations were due to the teaching by some CR leaders that alcoholism was a disease -- not a sin. After discussing the Scriptures together, we came to total unity that alcoholism is a sin involving physical addictions. Also, I was too simplistic on how God meets all of our needs. I have learned over the past few years that I was very wrong to discourage people with mental health challenges to seek professional advice and, when prescribed, to feel good about using medicinal treatments. God certainly works through doctors and professional counselors. For this I am deeply sorry.)

In terms of specific prohibitions, the reason the mainline church believes only in *a capella* singing (no instruments) is that in the New Testament, in the book of Acts and the letters, there is no mention of instruments in worship. Therefore, since they believe in a strict "be silent where the Bible is silent," they believe it is sinful to use instruments in the worship. And yet, when the

earliest Christians read their Bible, they read the Psalms that gloriously talked about praising God with the harp, the flute and the lyre. (Psalm 150) Therefore in our worship services we feel very comfortable with instrumental music and *a capella* singing.

As mentioned before, traditional Churches of Christ were primarily known for three things: no instruments of worship, adult immersion and autonomy. Those of us who left those congregations also knew them for their lack of growth, their lack of evangelism, their failure to call people to discipleship, their many divisions, their fear and crushing of charismatic leaders and their strong objection to spiritual leadership directly over more than one church. Initially the campus ministries sent their young, trained ministers into existing churches, new wine into old wineskins. However, both the wine and the wineskins were damaged. (Mark 2:22) The young ministers grew discouraged and many left the ministry; several of these uncommitted congregations, like the wineskins, split. Therefore, in the Boston movement, in what was then a very radical decision, we sent our newly trained ministers with a small group of disciples to plant new churches. **We thus started new congregations, when we saw that the lack of brotherhood and evangelism in the mainline church would prohibit world evangelism.** In time we were recognized as a separate movement from the mainline church.

The mainline church called themselves a brotherhood, but in fact there were multitudes of congregations in one city who did not fellowship each other. In Nashville, a city of 400,000, there are over 100 congregations of the mainline Churches of Christ. They were divided over such petty issues as one cup versus many cups at communion, having a kitchen in the church building and even such blatantly sinful divisions as being racially divided into black, white and Hispanic congregations. Interestingly, today among the Christian Churches of the Restoration Movement, there is a new growth strategy called “multisite ministries.” Under one eldership, one church meets in multiple locations in large metropolitan areas. Many of these meetings are house churches which are expected to reproduce themselves in the same city.

Some also have said it is unbiblical to have a “hierarchy” -- levels of leadership -- in the church both locally and as a brotherhood. Leadership and problem-solving among groups of people was detailed in Exodus 18 with the advice Moses’ father-in-law gave him. Following this Biblical principle, we organized the Boston Church by regions, sectors, family groups and Bible Talks according to the delegation of leadership as Jethro suggested –leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Structure is essential to unify, focus and motivate large groups to accomplish a single task -- in our case, “the task of testifying to God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24) Others have suggested that the only leadership titles we should use are “elder” and “evangelist.” This is quite limiting and does not describe the level of responsibility that a person has. Secondly, though the office of apostle does not exist today, we must have men who will rise to the challenge of being responsible for evangelizing large areas of the world. In the past, we have called these men “World Sector Leaders” or “Geographic Sector Leaders.” We do not need to be tied to the title or quarrel over words (2 Timothy 2:14), but the role and responsibility of the apostle/evangelist must exist so that we can evangelize the world. I would suggest calling these men “missions evangelists.” When the missions evangelists and other leaders are tied together by relationship, then there is a genuine brotherhood. (Romans 16)

A catchy phrase developed in the Churches of Christ segment of the Restoration movement was: “Bible things by Bible names.” It sounds so right. And yet, it leads to a narrowness of thinking as well as boundaries to our God-given creativity. (Remember, the word “Bible” is not in the Bible; the word “Scripture” is. So should we not call the Bible, “The Bible?”) In James Greig’s article, “What is Biblical,” he helps us understand how some interpretations of Scripture are

erroneous. For example, we need to distinguish whether a passage is prescriptive or descriptive. Prescriptive Scriptures give us commands and principles to obey. Descriptive Scriptures simply describe what was occurring in the context. Some have said we have been wrong in giving titles that are not in the Bible, i.e. Bible Talk Leader, Kingdom Kids Coordinator, World Sector Leader, Women's Ministry Leader, etc. In fact these are not prescribed titles; they are simply descriptive of their responsibility.

The call in the mainline Churches of Christ is to reestablish the patterns of the first century church. I certainly believe we are to submit to all the commands of the New Testament, but we are not bound by all the patterns. For example, when Paul went to a city to plant a church, his pattern was to go to the Jews first in the synagogue and then to the Gentiles. This was his pattern that we have not followed; but I do not believe we have done anything wrong. Some people have said there is no moving of groups of people (mission teams) to establish churches in the New Testament. (I do not believe that anyone should move to start another church against their will or conscience.) Tens of thousands of disciples would say that church planting by mission teams has proved incredibly effective. I believe this does not violate any command in the New Testament. Interestingly, I have been reading a book on the history of the Restoration Movement in Oregon, USA. In the 1800's, entire congregations would form a wagon train that would take them from the east to plant a church in Oregon. Though this is clearly not the pattern of the New Testament, these Christians exemplify the spirit of being a disciple and I am sure were pleasing to God. In my view, the Bible is not a line, but a path. After praying for wisdom, we are free to use our God-given creativity to come up with any methodologies that do not go outside the borders of the path. This will help keep our focus on the Spirit of the law and not the letter of the law.

This letter, *Revolution Through Restoration III*, obviously reflects my thinking through all the years to this hour. I realize I have so much more to learn. And in time, I may be persuaded by Scriptures and by my brothers to change my views in this letter as the Spirit continually works through us to restore God's Word and his Church.

Rekindling the Fires of Evangelism

Hebrews 11 is the grand chapter of faith. Once we marvel at Jesus, appreciate our salvation, draw close to one another in daily relationships, striving to become mature, we are called upon to be people of faith. Interestingly, this shift from an inward personal restoration to an outward revolution to change the world really begins in Hebrews 10:32. The Spirit stirs the grace-softened hearts of the readers to remember what it was like when they first became disciples. He reminds them of their idealism that stood against the spiritual forces of evil that had grave consequences such as public insults, confiscation of property and even prison. The Spirit reminds them that their brotherhood was so strong that when one of the disciples was criticized, they stood "side by side" with that individual so they would not be overwhelmed. Is this our heart for leaders and members who are criticized in and out of the church? The Spirit admonishes the church, "*But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*" (Hebrews 10:38-39) To be mature, to please God, we must not shrink back. Like our first century brothers and sisters, we have lost confidence in God, in our salvation, in our leaders, in the church and in ourselves. These Christians were called to follow the apostolic example of daily preaching the Word. (Acts 5:41, 42) And they knew they would be persecuted. **Never forget that even in the ministry of Jesus, where there was no faith, there were no miracles.**

(Mark 6:5, 6) And you can be sure, in our congregations, that where there are no miracles - no baptisms -- there is no faith.

In chapter 11, God's Spirit invokes the memory of the heroes of faith throughout the ages.

[These men and women] who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated -- the world was not worthy of them. Hebrews 11:33-38

These men and women overcame impossible problems both inside and outside of God's people. Yet their faith came at a price. The price was personal dreams, personal comfort, personal finances and personal safety. We must relinquish our American "pursuit of happiness" to please God by not shrinking back from our paying the price to save a lost world.

Most concerning, we see voting in our fellowship as the way to solicit the will of the people for the direction of the church. (What would have happened if the Jewish elders had asked the people to vote for a leader at the Red Sea?) Here too, we see a reactionary pendulum swing. In the past we did not get enough input from the membership, particularly from the non-paid leaders in the church. The Bible teaches the concept of the priesthood of all believers (I Peter 2:9-10). In other words, every Christian is a "priest," a "minister of reconciliation" (I Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, there should be no communication gap between the "clergy" and the "laity" because we are all brothers, fellow ministers. We must solicit the input of all of our brothers and sisters, but this does not mean that there should be a vote. From time to time, faith decisions require the few that are full of faith to persuade the many to believe. Also note that in Acts 6 the people brought the needs of the Grecian widows to the apostles. Then the apostles asked for the people's suggestions of spiritual men who should be in charge to meet this need of the church. (The Scriptures never record a person being voted into a leadership role.) After soliciting the people's recommendations, the apostles then commissioned these chosen individuals by the laying on of hands and the delegation of authority to them to handle the problem.

Since democracy is a very admirable form of political government, many sincerely believe that democracy is the highest form of government and want to bind that on the church. At different junctures, this clashes with what the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God and disrespects numerous cultures around the globe. For example, "taxation without representation" is an American concept people want to bring into the church. Many have adopted a "vote of confidence" mentality from the British parliamentary system. Where do we ever find a vote in the church of the Bible? We, in fact, are currently recreating the American mainline Church of Christ with, perhaps, a little bit warmer fellowship, which in many areas of the world could be called "a democracy of God."

Interestingly, in many democratic countries, churches are required to have a Board of Directors to ensure the legal and financial integrity of the church. (Romans 13) Several of our congregations

are finding there is a conflict between the spiritual leaders of the church – evangelists, elders, teachers, deacons, house church leaders, etc. – and the legally necessary Board of Directors of the church. Too often in the mainline Churches of Christ and in denominational churches, the Board of Directors gives direction to the church. I would strongly recommend that in the future, our Boards should be composed solely of mature Christians who are supportive of the Biblical leadership and who hold recognized spiritual offices in the church. They should not be selected because of age, wealth or success in the business world, unless they are also a spiritual leader. The Board should not give any ecclesiastical direction to the church. Their role is to merely be a safeguard for the integrity of the church in legal and financial decisions. Biblically, spiritual direction for the church should come from the spiritual leaders, who prayerfully are in touch with the expressed needs of the people.

If we are to be a people of faith, we must have leaders of faith. **I believe with all of my heart, that the leadership of a congregation is the spiritual ceiling of faith for the members.** To reiterate this principle, in Hebrews 13:7 the Spirit says, “*Remember your leaders who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*” If churches are not growing, there are perhaps many contributing and compounding problems in the leadership and the membership. However, if we are to once more become an advancing, growing movement of God, then our leaders must be men of great faith. After a period of time, if a congregation is not growing, then I believe the leadership needs to repent of their lack of faith and intensify their learning from other congregations. If their church still does not grow, then the evangelist (the man who leads the evangelistic charge) needs to step down and seek further training from another evangelist. The elders need to pray that God will send them an evangelist they can follow (and shepherd) as they build the church as a team.

Unfortunately, some will attempt to disregard the previous paragraph by saying that in their church they are growing in their knowledge of the Word of God and in their depth of their personal relationship with God. I commend both of these. However, when Jesus got up early in the morning to pray, to go deeper with God, he was ready to preach; Jesus believed that was why he had come. (Mark 1:35-38) As each disciple matures, becoming more and more like Jesus, then each of us will bear not only the fruits of the Spirit, but also the fruit of making new disciples. This is how we give glory to the Father. (John 15:4-8)

The Unshakable Kingdom

In Hebrews 12, we are drawn to the Scripture that says, “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. . .*” (Hebrews 12:28) This unshakable kingdom is composed of all the saved people of faith through the ages. Here on earth, certainly in our individual lives, in our individual congregations, and even in our movement, things are shaken. But after this shaking, which is from or at least allowed by God, when we go to heaven, we will be received into an unshakable kingdom.

Uncomfortable to some, the church is also the army of God to fight not flesh, not each other, but the spiritual forces of evil. (Ephesians 6:10-17) In Revelation 19, Jesus is portrayed as the leader of God’s celestial army at war with Satan, the False Prophet and worldly armies. In all wars, we know soldiers will be wounded and killed. So it is in our spiritual war. Sometimes our faith is shaken when a leader is wounded – they step out of the ministry, or when they are killed – when they fall away. We must remember that we became Christians because we decided that we loved God and our faith was not based on any man. At baptism, each of us proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord.”

We promised we would follow Jesus till death. These sad eventualities of leadership and spiritual war will grieve us but should not shake us if our faith is firm.

A more endearing term for the church is the family of God with him as our perfect Father. To lose a unified brotherhood is to lose family. An Indian evangelist in a recent sermon shared his convictions of what he learned about God's family from the Scriptures: "We must have relationships with each other that are not just life-long, but are so committed to each other's welfare, that no matter what we do, we cannot get rid of each other – just like a real family. Our heavenly Father will never leave us and therefore we should never leave one another."

In my opinion, family and brotherhood cannot be fully achieved unless there is a strong, loving central leadership as in a human family. Contrary to what some teachers would have us believe, strong central leadership is the hallmark of each of the powerful movements of God in the Bible, from Moses to Joshua to David to Nehemiah to, of course, Jesus and the apostles. (We will discuss church government later.) In Judges 2, the absolute necessity and the pattern of the restoration for God's people is specifically detailed:

The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. . . After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. They forsook the Lord . . . who had brought them out of Egypt. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him. . . In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them . . . Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges [leaders] who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. . . Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived . . . but when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt . . . they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. Judges 2:7–19

We must never forget that our perfect God has chosen to work through imperfect men to fulfill his mission. This glorifies our God all the more. Central leadership, godly men surrounding God's chosen leader, was present in each of the Old Testament movements, i.e. "Moses and the elders" (Deuteronomy 27:1), "Joshua and the elders." (Judges 2:7) This was "team leadership" but with a very definitive leader. In the book of Judges, one of the signs that God was forgotten was that there was no strong central leadership that could pull the tribes of Israel together to form a brotherhood, and thus, everyone "*did what was right in their own eyes.*" (Judges 21:25) The consequence was division among the people and desperate times. God, in his infinite wisdom, allowed these desperate times so that the people would cry out to him to be saved. His response would be to raise up his chosen leader, i.e. Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel, Saul, David and even Deborah. When God's leader died or, as with Gideon, stepped aside, the people fell away from God. Being anointed, or chosen by God, does not at all imply infallibility (like the Catholic Church's belief with the Pope) or even that the individual will be saved when they die, i.e. Saul and Judas. It does not necessarily mean they are even the people of God; i.e. the Lord called Cyrus "*his anointed*" in Isaiah 45:1. I believe being anointed of God is a principle that is still at work today. However, I realize some do not believe this principle applies today. Let us be patient with each other, by not looking down on or condemning each other. (Romans 14:3, 4)

In the early days, we were united by the infallibility of the Scriptures and our mission to seek and save the lost. In time, it was agreed by all that a structure of central leadership was necessary to propel the gospel to the far reaches of the world. **As time passed, we over-idealized our leaders and our unity. Our movement's unity became mandated by our structure instead of our mission.** Also, we did not allow for differences based on Scriptural perspectives, conscience and opinion. Subsequently, when much of our central leadership structure was dismantled over the past year and a half, it exposed disunity that had existed for many years. Less structure reveals and brings a greater test of our heart's desire to be united to God as well as with our leaders and each other. A more structured central leadership is favored by some of us to help with unity as long as it glorifies God and keeps our hearts focused on the mission. I believe we have so much to learn about true biblical unity. Many of us still over-idealize the unity among the New Testament leaders and churches, failing to see the problems and controversies that Satan desperately sowed trying to stop Jesus' mission to evangelize the world. **True unity of disciples gives glory to God. This is the witness of the power of Christ to a lost world.** (John 17:20-23)

In the past I and others have disqualified people from their roles for various reasons. In some cases, I was too lenient when the leaders were not repenting. However, in retrospect, I most of all regret that I did not give more time, more grace and more effort to each of these people so they would have gained the spiritual strength to carry on in their role. However, if they decide to quit for valid reasons such as health or, like Demas, they decide to quit the Lord altogether, then it is their decision. I would encourage us all to pray that God will make it financially possible to return to the ministry all the people who left but feel called to serve again. Elena and I will never forget the joy of the LA disciples when Tom and Kelly Brown and Mo and Amani Bishara victoriously returned to the full-time ministry as well as when John and Emma Causey humbly but powerfully returned from their sabbatical. By faith, we look forward to numerous similar celebrations around the world.

Brotherhood through Biblical Leadership

The Bible of the New Testament Christians was the Old Testament. This principle of strong leadership was exemplified, first of all, in John the Baptist, and then, of course, perfectly in Jesus who selected twelve apostles. (Let me say right here that I do not believe the office of apostle and the corresponding miraculous gifts are present today.) However, the word apostle literally means "messenger." This was the "title" that Jesus gave to his twelve chosen disciples to identify their work and role. He challenged them to see their work as servants who were called by God. These men were trained to be evangelists. Later, at the birth of the church, the apostles were the leaders of the young church.

In the New Testament, there seems to be a pattern of a dynamic evangelist planting the church and remaining there anywhere from three weeks to three years. One of his goals was to raise up elders, as well as younger evangelists. There seems to be a changing dynamic in the leadership of the church as it matures. It goes from a one-man leadership to a team leadership. The value of a group of elders and/or evangelists and teachers (as in Antioch) is that individually they each have a perspective of part of the congregation. Therefore, collectively they can make decisions that meet the needs of everyone in the now large congregation. In Antioch, there were five men that led the church as a team: Barnabus, the first preacher of Antioch; Simeon, called "Niger" (which means "black"), some believe this gave the leadership team ethnic diversity by virtue of his black skin; Lucius of Cyrene, a man from North Africa who would give a foreign perspective; Manaen, who must have come from an aristocratic background because he was brought up with Herod the

Tetrarch; and our brother Saul, a zealot, extremely knowledgeable of the Scriptures because of his tutelage by Gamaliel. What a team to disciple this huge Gentile church of thousands, located in this very diverse gateway city for trade to the East! The Spirit, in Ephesians 4, explains that the roles of leadership – evangelists, elders, and teachers – all should be focused on maturing each Christian, “*attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”

Once these churches became mature, with mature leaderships, they still had “outside” directives to their congregations. Yes, a team of elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and/or a team of evangelists and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1) are different models for directing the daily affairs of mature churches. The very letters of Paul to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, and all the many churches of the region of Galatia show specific input and direction from an outside evangelist. Even after appointing elders in the churches he had planted at the end of his first missionary journey, Paul returned to these churches on his second missionary journey, showing his plan to provide continued concern, influence, specific direction and input. (Acts 15:41)

There was greater independence as the churches matured, but there was never autonomy. Interestingly, Paul, an apostle/evangelist, after each of his three recorded missionary journeys would report back to Jerusalem to James and the brothers what God had accomplished through him. This was, after all, the center of influence for the New Testament Church. Paul, in his own mind, had been given the field of Asia Minor as well as the Macedonian vision which was the European world. Paul wanted to stay connected to the central leadership of the brotherhood. Also, he had Titus, the evangelist, appoint elders and then work inside the churches in the region of Crete. (Titus 1:5) Ultimately this was done by the preaching of the Word. (2 Timothy 4) It should be noted that the Paul/evangelist and Titus/evangelist leadership of the first century church is similar to our old leadership structure – one evangelist over another evangelist over the different fields of the world. Today many of our churches are autonomous and the direction of each of these individual congregations is largely given only by the elders. I believe this is another example of a reactionary pendulum swing. In the past we did not emphasize the role of elder enough, and now we have overreacted by diminishing the authority and the role of the evangelist. Leading by reaction does not arrive at the truth; it simply directs people to another distortion of the truth.

In 1 Corinthians false teachers had undermined Paul’s authority in that church. In chapter 4, Paul, as an apostle / evangelist, sought to forge unity between churches when he said with authority, “This is what I teach everywhere in every church.” He sent Timothy to the Corinthian Church to make sure they would imitate him as he imitated Christ. (1 Corinthians 4:14-17) (I doubt there was an interview.) I do believe elders are appointed by the evangelists to run the everyday affairs of the local congregation. But the forceful advancement of the kingdom was directed by evangelists who periodically gave direction to elders in all the congregations under their charge. (I do believe if an evangelist only operates inside of a congregation, then he is under that eldership.) As we are in the process of restoring the role of elders, it is interesting to note that no elder in the Old Testament or the New Testament is singled out by name. Some say Peter and John should be mentioned here. At first that looks true, but it is true because of their ministry as apostle/evangelists, not elders, though they served as both. Also, only evangelists appointed elders as well as other evangelists. We do not see an example in the Scriptures of one eldership giving direction to another eldership. (In time, many of our evangelists will become elders. Only in this way should an elder give direction to another church, but it is by virtue of being an evangelist, not an elder.)

I believe elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), and are to lead the way (pastor) in shepherding the members of a congregation and guarding the flock from wolves. The question has come, “Why are there not more elders?” In the early years of our fellowship, we concentrated on baptizing singles, young married couples, and those converted on the campus. It has taken many years for these individuals to mature to the point of having believing children. However, now we must act aggressively to raise up many more elders to strengthen the weak so that it will help to stop what is undoubtedly way too many leaving our churches. Steve Johnson, when leaving Boston to plant the New York City Church, said that one of the biggest differences between the mainline church in which his father preached and the Boston Church was that in Boston the elders and evangelists worked as a team with Kip as the leader and that they were all best friends. Steve noted the evangelists led the ministry and even directed the elders in their ministry. The elders watched over the spiritual life of the evangelists and the flock. This is true teamwork that maximizes each leader’s God-given talents.

In Acts 15 we find our first century brothers gathered for the Council of Jerusalem. This council came together to preserve unity for all the churches. **I would like to suggest that our new central leadership be called “The Council of the Brotherhood”** -- comprised of missions evangelists (those that have geographic charge over numerous churches) as well as selected elders. This group should be composed of a glorious diversity of leaders from first, second, and third world churches on every continent. It should reflect the demographics of the ICOC. This council could meet annually or simply when the need arose. As God is my witness, I covet no particular role. However, after many discussions with brothers I respect, I have found that several do not at this time see the need for or even believe in an organized, formal, central leadership. Therefore, I think we all need to be patient to see how God guides us in the future and not be judgmental of those who hold differing opinions. We must preserve the unity of God’s brotherhood as he reveals his will.

At this point, because of the great need for prayer and discussion among all the leaders of our congregations, and time to see where God is leading us, I will stop here in my thoughts on the roles of evangelists and elders. However, in my next letter, *Revolution Through Restoration IV*, I will share more in-depth from the Scriptures about God’s leadership principles.

The Integrity of Full-Time Leaders

In Hebrews 13:17, we are called upon to obey our leaders “*so their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*” In 1992, TIME magazine published an article saying that the ICOC was “unbesmirched by financial or sexual scandals...” To be accurate, among our churches, a very few of our leaders have sinned in adultery. In each case rebukes and forgiveness were given. In most cases they repented, were healed and were put back in the ministry after a proper amount of time. No sin is unforgivable except blaspheming the Holy Spirit – turning away from God. (Mark 3:29) The incredible anger and rage that some have had towards the lifestyle and salaries of our leaders are primarily centered in three areas – ignorance, envy and our changing church demographics.

Many of our leaders have sacrificed for many years with innumerable long days and even longer nights, serving God, his family and the lost with tears. I say this boasting in the Lord (2 Corinthians 11:21-28), I and other high profile evangelists have not only had our characters assassinated by the world, but we have also received numerous death threats to ourselves and our

families. Why do we continue on at such high cost? Because we are absolutely convinced that to please God, we must obey his calling to lead his people to evangelize the world at all costs. “The love of Christ compels us.” (2 Corinthians 5:14) The ministry is more than a job; it is the very calling of God. Some, in ignorance, think that to serve in a full-time capacity in our fellowship we must take a “vow of poverty” like priests in the Catholic Church. This is not the case. Different than Jesus and Paul, many of us have wives and children to support. We feel obligated to God not to receive an undue amount of salary, but simply enough to provide for our families. (1 Timothy 5:8) Cecil Wooten, a two-time Purple Heart recipient from World War II, and a former Sr. VP of Chicago Bridge and Iron, served as our former lead administrator for all the churches. At the suggestion of the ICOC General Council, Cecil sought professional analysis from outside consultants to compare our salaries to denominations and non-profit organizations. The results were that our top leaders were paid less than the top leaders of the denominations and the lower level leaders were paid more than in the denominations. The average income for our ministers is generally in line with the average income for denominational ministers. (See: http://www.ucd.net/KNN/archive/1999/19991109_008.htm) Biblically, churches are called to pay those who work hard among them: “Do not muzzle the ox as it treads out the grain.” (1 Corinthians 9:9)

I do know recently it was pointed out to me by my long-time friend Andy Fleming that through the years we have converted a lower percentage of white-collar and college students in our fellowship than in the early days. Overall, I see this as good. Our churches, for the most part, do reflect the demographics of the cities in which they are located, not only racially, but economically. Therefore we have an increasing number of people whose average salaries are considerably less than in our fellowship many years ago. Here we need prayer, sensitivity and good communication to make sure that each congregation is behind the philosophy of salary compensation chosen by that leadership.

Humorously, on a whim a brother in LA went to one of the internet sites that gives the salaries for particular occupations. He asked himself, “What would Jesus’ salary, with no wife or children, be in LA?” Remembering that Jesus was a carpenter, and later an evangelist, he looked up the salary compensation for a master carpenter and his full-time assistant. Applying this to our married couples, who serve as evangelists (master carpenters) and women’s ministry leaders (assistant carpenters) in LA, he found that these two salaries when combined were more than the combined salaries of almost all of the full-time ministry couples!

As for Elena and me, it has caused us untold pain to hear criticisms of our lifestyle and our children. After serving in the ministry for 28 years, we do not own a house. We have only a meager retirement fund. Why? Simply stated – not to be a stumbling block to our brothers and sisters – many of whom do not own houses. All of us should recognize, from a third world point of view, few of us could hardly be called sacrificial. We must not judge, criticize or look down on people’s personal decisions about sacrifice. **We must help each other stay sensitive to the insidiousness of materialism without binding our personal definitions of sacrificial living and thus freeing each other from unnecessary guilt from legalism.** In retrospect, I believe it is best for most ministers to eventually own homes to help ease the demands of their retirement years, and for those with children, to help pay for their college. Also in retrospect, we regret the high profile we and others gave to our kids while they were growing up; but now we must correct some misunderstandings. It is true that our youngest son just completed his senior year at a private high school during which he has had a full scholarship because of our financial needs, his academics and his national ranking in tennis. Our other son and daughter attend an Ivy League school. (Interestingly, tuition at this college is the same as Boston College, Boston University,

USC, Duke, Stanford and most other private universities of this caliber.) All three have received scholarships, money from their paternal grandparents and from friends who are wealthy brothers and sisters to help us pay for their education. Absolutely no church money has paid for our children's education or their athletics.

The criticism has put an inordinate amount of pressure on us as a family. It is sad that many have chosen to criticize the incredible accomplishments of ministers' children instead of rejoicing in these treasures of the kingdom. (Romans 12:15) When one of our children severely struggled spiritually, as with other families in this situation, there was little empathy and support. What we and our child felt was harsh condemnation which only exacerbated the situation. (It is sad to say, not only had we likewise in the past looked down on others in this situation, but also God had to allow us to experience this pain so that we could learn how to help these hurting families.) Similar to the feelings Paul expressed in 2 Timothy 4:16-18, Elena and I felt deserted. But through this, our faith has been refined to believe God will deliver us and our family from the lion's mouth. We take full responsibility for our children and do not hold anything against those who deserted us. We believe, as the proverb teaches, "*Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.*" (Proverbs 22:6) An older brother and past mentor who has faced similar challenges in raising his children, recently pointed out to me that I and many people in the movement had taught this passage incorrectly. We had simply said, "Train a child in the way he should go and . . . he will not turn from it." As idealistic, young evangelists leading an idealistic, young movement, we foolishly concluded that all of our children would become disciples, never struggle or fall away. But the passage actually says, "*when he is old he will not turn from it.*" We cannot absolutely judge whether someone has raised their children in the Lord until that child is "old." (See the *UpCyberDown* story on the baptism of Brad Pillatsch on Father's Day: http://ucd.net/home/content/main/2003/06/Brad_Pillatsch_06_20_03.htm) Obviously, short-term judgments are necessary in order to determine whether an individual fulfills one of the qualifications of an elder by having believing children. (Titus 1:6)

As for ministers' compensation, I personally have no problem with people knowing the amount of the salaries. "Do not muzzle the ox" is a Biblical principle. The amount of salary is an opinion application of that principle. Our experience has been that when the salaries are revealed many succumb to envy if the salary is more than their own even when the full-time servant has been in the ministry for 10 or 20 years more than they have been in the work force. People in their 20s and 30s who have never bought houses have been critical of ministers in their 40s and 50s buying homes. We need to repent of our critical attitudes and be supportive of our full-time servants. The truth is that a number of ministers have left the ministry because of the constant criticism of their lifestyle and their children – the "fishbowl effect." Instead of criticizing these sacrificial servants, their arms need to be held up so they do not become too weary. I am not saying that ministers should not be confronted and gently called to repent (Galatians 6:1). But when we crucify our strongest leaders, we will be led into mediocrity by leaders who are afraid of the membership and we will not evangelize the world. We need the spirit of Nehemiah to restore the house of heroes. (Nehemiah 3:16) **If being in the full-time ministry is not the call for those of our number with the most God-given gifts/talents of leadership, then our ministers will be like the ministers of so many denominations who are either average or socially inept, have good hearts, but cannot lead people.**

The Women's Role in Ministry

During the early years of our fellowship, we grew so quickly and were so consumed with the mission, that sometimes we minimized different cultures or individual differences of opinion. **In our movement, we have taught that all conflict comes from sin. But this is not true. A much greater opportunity for conflict is in the area of opinion.** If we do not distinguish opinion from doctrine, we sin when we call ourselves right and others wrong. They in turn often feel hurt, angry and defensive, and sin in response. Paul wrote extensively of this in Romans 14 and 15.

Presently in our churches there is controversy surrounding the women's role, particularly of the evangelist's wife. Some believe that, like the apostles mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9, the wives should work a secular job to help support the husband and families. (The Proverbs 31 woman earned money for her family.) Others believe the wife should not hold a job outside the home. (In the southern part of the US, where the mainline church is very strong, this cultural position is favored by many people.) Still others believe the evangelist's wife should be supported by the church to lead and help the other women. In this day and age when many families need two incomes, it seems best to me to have both husband and wife serving side-by-side in the full-time ministry. However, I understand that different cultures and personal preferences come to bear here. I would recommend that in the future we leave this up to the local church to deem what is best in each case. We must seriously ask ourselves how badly we want dynamic, serving women's ministries. Tragically, many young single women whose dream is to serve and impact other young women while being supported by the church are being robbed of an incredible opportunity. Also many married women have treasured the opportunity to work side by side in the Lord's vineyard with their husbands. We must remember that supporting young women is not prohibited by the Scriptures; therefore, it is allowable by God and, from my point of view, crucial for abundantly fruitful women's ministries. (Romans 16:6, 12) We must also remember the profound wisdom of women leading other women (Titus 2:4, 5).

Jesus' Dream Has Not Died

***Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'* Nehemiah 1:8-9**

In the midst of these troubled times, I still have the dream. I still believe in Jesus' dream to evangelize the world in our generation. If we are to rebuild the wall, we must assess the damage and not minimize or rationalize our situation. A few weeks ago in San Francisco, a sister said to me, "I think what we are going through is Acts 8, a scattering of the disciples." I shared with her how many had left the movement and the ministry and how the churches were divided. She was distraught as her natural optimism was sobered by reality. Another brother said to me, "Brother, it must be great to know that God used you to evangelize the world." I replied, "Brother, we were only able to establish churches in 171 nations out of 240 nations. We only had a handful of disciples in one city in most of those nations and sadly we are now in only 159 nations. Yet, there are seven billion lost souls to reach."

When I returned home to LA, another sister stated, “I know presently there are not very many baptisms in our church. However, I believe we will baptize again when we take care of the weak. For example, in Acts 6, when the overlooked widows had their needs met and became the ‘happy widows,’ then growth returned more than ever.” I smiled and said, “It’s good to know that God and his church can even make widows content. However, what you have said is only partially true. I realize that many groups in our fast-growing movement were overlooked as well as underfed with mature teachings from the Word. And yes, when you meet these people’s needs, they will be happy and more inclined to do the will of God. However, the way the Grecian widows’ needs were met was by the apostles/evangelists delegating to the seven “deacons” the responsibility to make sure the widows had enough to eat. The Bible teaches that the apostles delegated this responsibility so they could focus solely on “prayer and the ministry of the Word.” Then, because of their inspirational example and their inspirational preaching, calling the now well-fed flock to each one evangelize, the Bible reads, *and then the number of disciples increased rapidly*. . . Shepherding is essential, and we have not had enough of it, but that, in and of itself, will not cause the church to grow rapidly. We need evangelists to preach the Word publicly, from house to house and to the church so that men and women will be saved.”

As for me and my family, being paid by the “central kingdom fund” of the ICOC is no longer a possibility. Since I served as the World Missions Evangelist for all the churches, our salary was paid out of the Special Contribution of all the first world churches. (As I mentioned before, for the most part, no evangelist is presently paid by the churches he oversees, but only the local congregation in which he serves. This, in my opinion, needs to change.) For the past several months, Elena and I have served the campus ministry at Long Beach State. God has encouraged us by working side by side with the Pellizzeris and the Mains. The Lord has blessed us with the most baptisms this semester from the campus that there have been in several years. In April when we saw that our support would soon end, Elena and I began to pray for God’s Spirit to direct us to a new ministry.

Like most of you, we are of the conviction that every “event” in our lives is either caused by God or allowed by God for a purpose. With this in mind, after this summer, we will be “empty nesters,” which will allow us an incredible amount of freedom to serve in the ministry. A few days ago I turned 49 years old, and in the fall Elena will be 48, and if God allows, we have perhaps 25 years until eternity. We have firmly decided that we simply in good conscience cannot spend the rest of our lives in tears in Babylon. If we as leaders and members do not radically repent, then I believe God will look to start again. After all, no Christian movement has evangelized the world in any century except the first century. For though there were flickers of the Holy Spirit through the centuries, God loved his righteousness more than his movements which all became unrighteous. The Word is the seed of the Kingdom, and God can raise up the “children of Abraham from the stones” – any dead denomination (Luke 3:9). If God starts again with only 3,000, as on the Day of Pentecost, Amen. If God’s remnant is only 300, as with Gideon, Amen. If only 30, as in the Gempels’ living room, Amen. If there are only three of us, then at least Jesus will be with us – Amen. I know that God is not finished with Elena and me. He has spent the last two years “disciplining, shaping and molding” us. Even more importantly, we are determined to be on God’s side to the end. Therefore it gives me great joy to announce that by God’s grace we have recently begun to lead the church in Portland, Oregon. **Rest assured, at this time Elena and I are totally committed to brotherhood and to evangelizing the world through the fellowship of the ICOC.** “Our highest joy” is Zion. (Psalm 137:6) Therefore, we solicit your prayers that the Spirit will guide us to begin to rebuild the wall, alongside each of you.

Call to Revolution and Unity

1. Individual Confession of Sin to God – All of our sins have forced God to take us to Babylon. Those who repent, God will take to Zion. It helped me tremendously to write out my sins of leadership and lack of “followership” in this letter – not for other people, but for me to see the number and the magnitude of my sins over the past few years. I also realized that I had to take full responsibility for each of these sins, whether or not someone had hurt me first. I would encourage each Christian to write out your sins of leadership and/or followership. When we realize that our sin list is two, three, four pages or more, how can we continue to grumble about our hurts, our leaders’ failures and not forgive those who have hurt us, when we so desperately need God to forgive our many, many sins? If you have not been restored to our Father because you have not reconciled with our brothers and sisters, prayerfully this will motivate you to seek out those you are distant from or angry with because of sin or a difference of opinion. God calls his children to *“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4:3)

2. Day of Prayer –Restoration and Celebration: I would like to encourage all church leaders to set aside a specific day, or perhaps, a whole weekend of Restoration and Celebration for all of our churches around the world. Let us invite all of those who have left our fellowship for whatever reason to join us in our restoration to God. Then our unified prayers could once more move our God to do “even greater things” (John 14:12) inside and outside of our fellowship. This would mark the end of the apologies for the past and the beginning of a new era of brotherhood and world evangelism.

3. Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers: Let me appeal to all my fellow leaders to remember that we are but the servants of God through whom our brothers and sisters came to believe. Some planted, some watered but it was God who made our movement grow. I beg you, let us not have autonomous churches of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, but let us call everyone to Christ; then, we will truly be his church and a unified movement. We are God’s fellow workers. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9) Also, I appeal to you to eliminate the clergy/laity gap in many of our churches. To begin our ministry in Portland, Elena and I plan to distribute a one-page questionnaire with three questions to each member. Then we will meet with each house church to discuss their responses to: “What is awesome about the Portland Church? What most needs to change in the Portland Church? What themes or books of the Bible do you feel need to be taught to mature the Portland Church?”

4. Holiness: *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up. . . Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger . . . slander, be kind and compassionate to one another.”* (Ephesians 4:29-32) The word holiness in the Greek literally means “to be set apart.” Collectively, we must be distinct from the world. Our Father is deeply hurt by his children who gossip (or listen to gossip), slander (or read slander) and then dwell on evil thoughts about one another – even judging our brother’s and sister’s motivations. For many, to exchange emails and to look at certain sites on the internet is to be enticed into these sins. Let us reaffirm that we need to hold each other’s sins in complete confidentiality. Let us renounce the devil’s schemes to destroy our precious unity.

5. Evangelism: We all need to repent in our lack of sharing our faith. Every single disciple needs to remember that we are all ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ. (2

Corinthians 5:18-20) God's mission united us in the early days; it can and should unify us in the future.

6. Giving: We need to radically repent in our weekly giving. Though I do not think a tithe is commanded in the New Testament, this is perhaps a good target for each of us as Christians. Then, prayerfully, more interns, evangelists, elders and teachers can be put on staff to train us, and our ever-increasing family, to build up the church *“until we all reach unity in the faith.”* (Ephesians 4:13) Also, many evangelists can be trained to be sent out to start new congregations. Increasing our giving should come through Scriptural motivations, primarily by inspiring the membership to sacrifice to meet needs out of a loving willing spirit, never from compulsion. (Exodus 35, 36)

7. Titus Project: I would like to suggest that in each country, particularly the US, the churches cooperate in a plan to evangelize all the mid-size and small cities. We could call this the Titus Project. Titus the evangelist oversaw all the churches in the country of Crete. Especially the large churches of over 500 should strive to send out small groups of disciples establishing churches who would evangelize these cities and towns. Like the churches in Crete, they may not all be able to afford evangelists, but in time, would all be directed by elders. They would be inspired and trained by circuit, overseeing evangelists. We could encourage those who were raised in these cities and feel called by the Spirit to “go home” and evangelize their friends from their youth as well as their grandparents, parents and siblings. *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”* (2 Corinthians 2:14) I have already set before the Portland Church the “Titus Project” vision for the state of Oregon. Prayerfully this fall, through a cooperative effort of the San Francisco and Portland Churches, the Spirit will plant a new congregation in the city of Eugene, home of the University of Oregon. Then early next year we will plant a house church in Corvallis, home of Oregon State University. By the grace of God, in the next few years we plan to start house churches in all the smaller cities of Oregon. In keeping with Paul and Titus’ vision, we plan to “appoint elders in every town.” (Titus 1:5) Please keep us in your prayers.

Because They Held on to Something

In closing this momentous epistle to the Hebrews, the writer shares some incredibly encouraging news, “. . . *our brother Timothy has been released* [from prison].” I am reminded of the inspiring movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* in which there was a mission to destroy all the evil in the world and yet it would be against impossible odds for only the few. The group of nine beings known as “The Fellowship of the Ring” becomes divided and yet the dream drove them forward. Frodo, the bearer of the ring, was overwhelmed with his singular challenge and said to his best friend Samwise, “I can’t do this.” Samwise responds:

I know, it’s all wrong.
By rights, we shouldn’t even be here . . .
But we are.

It’s like the great stories, Mr. Frodo – the ones that really matter.
Full of darkness and danger they were.
And sometimes you didn’t want to know the end.
Because how could the end be happy?

How could the world go back to the way it was,
When so much bad has happened?
But in the end, it's only a passing thing,
A shadow.
Even darkness must pass.
A new day will come.
And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer.
Those are the stories that stay with you.
That really meant something...
Even if you were too small to even understand why.
I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now.
Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back.
Only they didn't.
They kept going.
Because they held onto something . . .
And it's worth fighting for.

There have been many times I have felt, "I can't do this," and "By rights, we shouldn't even be here." Perhaps you have recently had similar feelings. I still vividly remember when the young church in Cairo, Egypt, was so persecuted by the Muslim authorities that seven of the original eight mission team members were kicked out of the country because they were Americans. Knowing that the church's faith was very fragile, one month later in the summer of 1989, I took Elena and the children to live in Cairo for four weeks and stabilize the church by our presence and by preaching the Word. Though we ourselves were persecuted, insulted and our lives threatened, this only served to bond us more with our Father in heaven and our Egyptian brothers and sisters. Therefore, I was moved by this very recent account of one of our Egyptian brothers. A few weeks ago the evangelist in the nation of Sudan, who is Egyptian, was found after being missing for three weeks. One of the disciples discovered he had been taken to prison for preaching the gospel in this Muslim nation. When the disciple said, "I will try to get you out of here as soon as possible," our jailed brother responded, "God will release me when it is time for me to leave." The dismayed visiting disciple was totally perplexed and asked, "Why aren't you anxious to leave? Your wife just had a baby and you have never seen him." He replied, "As many as 50 people have been attending my group Bible studies in jail. Of them, I am studying the Bible personally with 15 of the men. God will decide when his work in here is done." This is the heart of all true disciples. This is the heart of Jesus. Encouragingly, our Egyptian brother was just released from two months in the Sudanese jail.

God wants to take us back to Zion. Let us hold on and never let go of each other or of Jesus' dream to evangelize the world in our generation. And as Samwise said, "It's worth fighting for."

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