

2. See Judg. 5:5; Nahum 1:5.
3. See Acts 13:22.
4. See Lk. 9:23.
5. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), **cross** (#G4716).

## Chapter 5

### *Do We Run Away Or Go In?*

*A chance to meet the One you  
always knew was there*

Whenever I encounter a party scene or see people drinking and acting like pure pagans, *I can't help but like them!* They don't play any religious games. They know who and what they are. (The ones who irritate me are the ones who play games and pretend to be something they are not!) Almost every time I pass by a bar or nightclub, the crazy thought comes to mind, *Lord, why not right here? Why don't You just break out right here?*

My definition of revival is when God's glory breaks out of the four walls of our churches to flow through the streets of the city. Revival of historical proportions in modern times would be when God invades the shopping malls on Friday night. I want to see every mall association be forced to hire full-time chaplains just to handle the crowds of people they find weeping under conviction each shopping day. I want to see citywide calls for volunteer ministers just to handle the flood of people who get convicted of their sins when they pass through the town. (Security guards know what to do with shoplifters, but would they know what to do with people who come up to them in distress because they've been convicted of their sin?) Hasten the day!



I believe God has stirred such a pent-up demand for His presence that in the "day of the Lord" (if His people will pursue His presence), the existing churches will not be able to handle the explosion of lost souls wanting to be saved. The modern Church is a caretaker or a maintenance organization at best, and a museum of what once was, at worst. Our greatest problem is that we've "stocked our shelves" with the wrong stuff. We offer the hungry our dusty shelves of bland, man-produced religious ritual that no one in his right mind is really hungry for! Empty religious ritual is as appetizing as "blue mashed potatoes" or some other unnatural concoction. If anybody could ever open a store that just dispenses Jesus, the hungry masses would come. Perhaps the reason we haven't stocked our services with the right stuff is because it doesn't come cheap.

The Church today has made it to the halfway point in its journey across the wilderness. We are camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, much like the children of Israel in the Book of Exodus. It is obvious that we have reached the point where we are going to have to make a decision. Will we go in or run away?

*And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;*

*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.*

*Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine:*

*And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exodus 19:3-6).*

This is New Testament language on the pages of the Old Testament. They were given the obvious option of leap-frogging to a new level of intimacy.<sup>1</sup>

### We've Come to a Mountain of Decision

We can be contented with burning bushes and rejoice over our first encounters with the supernatural God. We can be satisfied with the God-carved tablets of revelation and wisdom and all the other things that He does. But now we've come to a mountain of decision, the proverbial "fork in the road." God has pulled us out of sin and out of the world. He has begun to make a people out of us. That's what the journey in the wilderness was all about; God was making a people out of "no people."

Peter wrote, "Which in time past were *not a people*, but are now *the people of God*: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:10). God took slaves and menial servants who had no education and certainly no self-esteem, and He planted His own character in them and placed His name on them. He pulled them out of Egypt and said, "Now, I'm going to make a *people* out of you." He was literally building a Bride.

The Lord brought the descendants of Abraham to the base of Mount Sinai, but it wasn't easy. When the multitude of people needed food, God wanted them to seek Him for their bread, but instead they berated Moses and talked about how good it was back in Egypt, the place of their bondage. Nevertheless, Moses prayed and God supplied quail and manna. The same thing happened when there was a water shortage. Instead of asking God or believing in His abundant supply, they immediately cornered Moses to complain and talk about the "good old days" in Egypt. God had something better for the children of Israel, but it was almost as if He was thinking, *If I can just get them past this mountain, then I can have hope of taking them all the way.*

### Called to "A Place in Him"

The sad and unfortunate truth of the Book of Exodus is that the motley group of people God brought to Mount Sinai was *not the group of people* that He took across the river Jordan into the promised land. *Something happened at the mountain.* God called them and made them a nation for the first time in their history. He called them to a place—a place of blessing and a



place of change—where they didn't want to go. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that this "place" was merely some physical spot on the map, because these people were already traipsing across the wilderness. Their blessing didn't consist of some rocky real estate someplace, although the promised land was part of the package deal. God called them to a *promised place in Him*. He called them to a place of covenant, a place of intimacy with their Creator that was not offered to any other people on the planet at that time. *That's the secret of the secret place*. We think that the idea of a "kingdom of priests" is an exclusively New Testament or Christian idea, but it was also God's original plan for Israel!

*And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,*

*And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.*

*...when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount (Exodus 19:10-11,13b).*

Although the first generation of Israelites gathered around the mountain would ultimately believe the fearful spies and shrink away from the promised land in fear, the real cause of their failure is found right there at the foot of Mount Sinai. God intended for *all* the Israelites to come *close to Him* on the mountain, but they were uncomfortable.

*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.*

*And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*

*And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*

*And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18-21).*

They saw the lightning and heard the thunder, and they shrank back in fear. They ran from His presence instead of pursuing Him as Moses did. They were unhappy with the style of leadership that God had chosen. (He couldn't lay down His identity as the Almighty God just to please man then, and He won't do it today either.) So the end result of their flight from holy intimacy that day was that they died before they or their children ever entered the promised land. *They preferred distant respect over intimate relationship.*

It wasn't God's original plan for the first generation of Israelites to die in the wilderness. He wanted to take the *same group* of people whom He brought out of the land of bondage into the land of promise. He wanted to give His new nation of former slaves their very own land and inheritance, *but they* wouldn't have it because of fear and unbelief. Their doom was sealed when they looked across the Jordan at the promised land and shrank back, but it really began when they shrank back from God's presence in the cloud on Mount Sinai. It was there that they ran from God and demanded that Moses stand between them. (The Church has been suffering from the same problem ever since.) We often prefer that a man stand between us and God. *We have a hell-inspired, fleshly fear of holy intimacy with God.* The roots of this fear reach all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve hid in shameful fear while God longed for sweet fellowship. *now*

### Do We Run Away Or Go On In?

Now look closely at your local church. I can almost guarantee you that some of the people in the congregation were there "in the beginning." Others came a few months later or several years later. Some are brand-new believers or at least new arrivals. God has brought all of you to the mountain today. You who were "not a people," have been made a people. God took all of us out of the slavery of sin. He's pulled some of us out of



bad marriages. Others were delivered from the bondage of alcoholism and other chronic substance-abuse problems. We've been delivered from joblessness and destitution, chronic depression, and too many other pits of hell to mention. In the end, we have all wound up together at the foot of His mountain hearing His call to come closer. Now we face the same challenge as the children of Israel thousands of years ago: *Do we run away or go in?* Into what? Into His presence.

There is an air of expectancy and excitement in the Church today. You probably sense that "it's not too much further" as I do. Some scholars believe that when the Israelites stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, they were only a few days' march away from the promised land. The only reason they were delayed was because of their reluctance to press in to God. Their fear of intimacy sowed the seeds for fear of the enemy. The same can be said of most churches today. I really sense that we stand at a critical crossroads today.

On the one hand, we could say, "We've come too far to turn around now." But we could also say, "We're really tired. We want to sit here for a while." The real question is, What does God say? I believe He wants us to grasp where we are at this point. He wants us to reach out and receive everything He has to give us for today.

You and I are going to do one of two things from this point on:

1. We will grow into a relationship with Him, no matter what it costs us, or,
2. We will turn back to where we came from and become a program-driven, meeting-going, organizing, committee-run church people, doing all the "good" things that "good people" are supposed to do. We will end up fondly looking back on this time of decision and saying, "Those were the days."

I don't know about you, but I don't want to grow old and look back with regret someday and say, "Oh, those were great days." Why should I when I've come to understand that with God I can live in the present tense? I can walk in the freshness

of what He has for me *every day*. If we dare to follow God today, then on some tomorrow we may be able to look back and say, "I remember those years; that was *before* we had the great revival of His presence!"

### Our Future Depends on Our Outlook

Frankly, our future depends on our outlook in this hour of decision. If our outlook is, "Well, we've done pretty well," then this is probably all we'll do. But our futures will look totally different if we say, "Thank You, Lord...but *where's the rest?* There's got to be more! Show me Your glory!"

Satan's most successful trick is to get us to race to false finish lines. He works tirelessly to get us to stop short and say, "We made it!" He delights when he sees us fall or pull over to the wayside only to notice at the last moment that *the finish line is still ahead*. The apostle knew of what he spoke when he said, "I press toward the mark, forgetting those things that are behind" (see Phil. 3:13-14).

We need to learn from the events at Mount Sinai. It was there that the Israelites built the tabernacle according to the instructions God gave to Moses. It was on Mount Sinai that God gave to Moses the great revelation of His law in the Ten Commandments. But other equally important things happened there as well. It was also there that a golden calf of idolatry was created.

First of all, God revealed on Mount Sinai that He wanted to begin dealing with the people *directly* and personally. Until that day, Moses had always relayed to the Israelites everything that God said. That was a time of transition, a period in which God was saying, "Okay, it's time to grow up. I want to talk to you directly from now on as an entire nation of holy priests. I don't want to have any more intermediaries. I love Moses, but I don't want to have to speak through him to reach you. I want to deal with you directly as My nation, as My people."



### Many Have Become "Milk Babies" in Padded Pews

Unfortunately, the Israelites suffered from the same problem many Christians do today. We have become addicted to the anointing, the relayed word of good preaching and teaching. Too many of us have become "milk babies" who want to sit on padded pews in an air-conditioned and climate-controlled building where someone else will pre-digest what God has to say and then regurgitate it back to us in a half-digested form. (We're afraid of getting "spiritual indigestion" from messages we think are "too rough" to handle.) *Tender tummies are unused to tough truth!*

The solution is hunger and desperation for God Himself without intermediaries. We need to pray, "God, I'm tired of everybody else hearing from You! Where is the lock on my prayer closet? I'm going to lock myself away until I hear from You for myself!" *Get a Jacob desire + have a name! Then a true encounter*

We make a great deal out of reading the Word and that is important. But we need to remember that the early Church didn't have access to what we call the New Testament for many years. They didn't even have the Old Testament Scriptures because those expensive scrolls were locked up in synagogues. The only Scriptures they had were the verses from the law, the Psalms, and the prophets that had been passed down orally from grandfathers and grandmothers—and that only if they were Jewish believers. So what *did* they have? They walked and talked with *Him* in such a rich level of intimacy that it wasn't necessary for them to pour over dusty love letters that were written long ago. They had God's love notes freshly written on their hearts.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit is saying, "Look, I know it's great that I've brought you out of sin and your clothes aren't wearing out. You are living in a measure of blessing, and you have My presence revealed in the cloud and the fire every day. I know you've got good leadership, but what *I* really want is this: I want to grow you up and I want to pull you close in a new level of intimacy."

No true revival has ever occurred simply because people sought revival. They were birthed when people *sought Him*. In our presumptuous thinking, we have said, "Okay, we're going to hold a revival." You might as well try to hold a hurricane! If you can hold it, then "it ain't revival." If you can contain it or control it, then "it ain't revival either." We need to call it what it is: a series of good meetings complete with whipped-cream preaching and maraschino cherries of man on top! We may love it and lick our lips through every minute of it, *but it isn't revival*. We have to face the fact that we have become addicted to all the things that accompany church, like the choirs and the music. But they are not what God calls "church" and they are not true revival either. I have a strong sense that God is about to strip all that away to ask us, "Now, who loves *Me*? Who wants *Me*?" It's time to seek the Reviver instead of revival!

God is tired of having *long distance relationships* with His people. He was tired of it thousands of years ago in Moses' day, and He is tired of it today. He really wants to have intimate, close encounters with you and me. He wants to invade our homes with His abiding presence in a way that will make every visitor begin to weep with wonder and worship the moment they enter.

### \* Run Away Or Go In

*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.*

*And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18,21).*

What a divine dichotomy! One ran in; the other ran away!

God was calling the people to intimacy and they ran the other way! They told Moses, "...let not God speak with us, *lest we die*" (Ex. 20:19). They understood that only things that match the character of God as depicted in the Ten Commandments could stand to live in His presence. By running away, they were saying, "Look, we don't want to live up to that. Don't let God talk to us right now." All God wanted them to do when



He gave Moses the Ten Commandments was to clean up their act so He could do more than just see them from a distance. He wanted to walk with them once again in the cool of the desert day. He wanted to sit with them and share His heart in intimate communion. Nothing has changed, my friend. He wants to do the same thing now with you and me. Our proper response is, "Please, God, speak with us *even if we have to die!*"

The sad reality may be that most Christians in America don't have a real sense of the abiding presence of God because they refuse to clean up the clutter in their lives. And many of us who attempt to clear the clutter tend to get stuck in the logjam of legalism.

### ➤ Hearing Father's Footsteps

When the Israelites told Moses that they were afraid, he tried to explain to them, "Fear not, God is only trying to prove you. That thunder and lightning reminds you of His awesome power so that you won't sin. You see, He's just wanting you to come clean so He can talk with you" (see Ex. 20:20). Isn't it amazing how ponderous and heavy your parents' footsteps seemed to be when you heard them come in your direction, especially at those times when you were doing something you shouldn't have been doing? The Israelites were hearing Father's footsteps.

The Bible says, "And the people stood afar off," while "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was" (Ex. 20:21). What a picture. The people are running this way while Moses is running that way, saying, "Come on, guys, it's God. He's just saying, 'Come near to Me.' He's never done this before. When I was up on the mountain He let me get this close, and now He's come down because He wants all of us to draw near to Him together."

God always starts with the leadership, and Moses had already stepped into that thick darkness once before on the mountaintop. At this point, God wanted the rest of the Israelites to join Moses in His presence, but they ran away instead. It appears to me that the history of the Jewish people went downhill from the moment God said, "Come near," and

they said, "No way." And it is abundantly clear that this problem isn't unique to the Israelites of Moses' day—it is also a serious problem in the Church today.

### • All They Want to Do Is "Date" God

There is something in us that makes us afraid of the commitment that comes with real intimacy with God. For one thing, intimacy with God requires *purity*. The days of fun and games in the Church are over. What do I mean by "fun and games"? If your definition of fun is "low commitment and lots of thrills and chills," then all you've ever wanted to do is "date God." You just wanted to get in the backseat with Him. Do I need to draw a picture? God is tired of us wanting to get our thrills from Him without putting on the ring of commitment! Some are more enamored with the "goose bumps" than the glory! They're addicted to the anointing, liking the feeling of being blessed, receiving the "gifts" like a religious "gold-digger," happy with chocolates, flowers, and jewelry. The last time I checked, He was still looking for a bride, not a girlfriend; one who will "stick" with Him.

I'm afraid that many people in the Church have simply approached God to get what they can from Him without committing anything in return. God is saying to His Church, "I don't want that. Now if you want to marry Me, let's do this right. Let's pledge ourselves to each other." We've chased after cheap thrills without the commitment, but God is saying, "Intimacy." And He's saying it everywhere: "Intimacy." And *out of that intimacy* will come revival. The babe of revival is hewn from the granite rock of commitment to the Bridegroom. Babies are always birthed from intimacy. It's time to "draw near."

We've often placed the cart before the horse. We say, "We want revival," and never mention intimacy. We seek revival without seeking *Him*. That's a lot like some stranger of the opposite sex walking up to you and saying, "I want kids. What do you say? I don't really know you and I'm not even sure I like you. Of course, I don't want all the commitment that goes with marriage, but I really do want children. How about it?"



Leaders in the Church have written countless books on how to grow churches, but sometimes the underlying message there is, "This is how to grow churches without relationship with Him." We have tried to find shortcuts to short-circuit the "intimacy requirement" every way we can. Why? It is because what we want is a "bunch of kids" sitting on the pews in the church so we can look around and compare with everybody else's church family in town. Children in and of themselves do not make a household! They are the natural by-product of a loving relationship and intimacy in a marriage. Frankly, most of our churches today are the spiritual equivalent of a dysfunctional household—"single parent" presbyteries. Where is "Dad"?

What we really need to be seeking is a *real relationship with God*. Anytime you put a man and a woman together who love each other, you don't have to worry about whether or not they will have children in most cases. It's a natural outgrowth of the process of intimacy.

Why is it that the largest revivals in the last century have never been held on American soil? I think it dates to the era when our morals went down the tubes along with our commitment levels. I propose that our nation's collective ability to really grow deep in its relationship with God is accurately mirrored in its reciprocal (or opposite) factor—by our skyrocketing trend toward rampant divorce rates and broken marriages. In other words, we have forgotten or dismissed as unimportant the lost art of commitment to God. As we made the choice to turn away from God's face at the mountain, every other commitment in our lives began to deteriorate and fall apart as well.

### Hothouse Christians Have No Root

Most Christians in North America are "hothouse Christians" who bloom as long as they are kept in a protected and carefully controlled environment far from fear, distress, or persecution. "God forbid that it should 'cost' us something to speak the name of Jesus."

But time and again, we have seen that if you take hothouse Christians out of their protected environment and put them

into the real world where the wind of adversity blows and the rain of sorrow falls; if they have to endure the hot sun and the drought it brings, then they discover that they never developed a root system in the hothouse. So they wither and say, "I'm just not cut out for this!"

God has dealt with me to the point where I have been forced to redefine some of my criteria for what it means to be "saved." If it takes the "perfection of environment" to prove the presence of God in your life, then my guess is that the persecuted Christians just don't have God. How can they? They don't have Bible seminars; they don't have choirs or the latest worship music. They don't have air conditioning, ushers, nurseries, electronic paging systems, carpeted sanctuaries, or staff counselors. Their worship environment is terrible. If they get caught having church, they must pay a terrible price. I read an account of a group of Chinese Christians who were caught holding a church service. The officials placed a horse trough in the middle of town and forced every man and woman in that congregation to urinate into it. Then they drowned the pastor in it, right in front of their eyes!

Do you know what happened? The church congregation doubled in two weeks, and it wasn't because of their nice sanctuary or dynamic worship team. True church growth, wherever it may be, in freedom or persecution, comes because of only one thing. It springs forth from an intimate knowledge of the living God.

### \* The Confession of People in Love

These kinds of believers don't gauge their relationship with God by whether they received a salary raise this quarter, by how things are going with their bank account, or by how much "fun" they've had during church activities. They have joined Paul by saying, "But none of these things move me, *neither count I my life dear unto myself*, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). This is



the confession of people in love and in intimate communion with their Maker.

God is calling. The first time God revealed this to me, I trembled and wept in front of the people as I told them the same thing I tell you today: "You are at Mount Sinai today, and God is calling you into personal intimacy with Him. If you dare to answer His call, then it is going to redefine everything you've ever done." Your decision today will determine whether you go forward or backward in your walk with Christ.

Intimacy with God requires a certain level of brokenness because purity comes from brokenness. The games are over, friend. He's calling you.

Could it be that we don't want to get into that cloud with God because we know He's going to look into our hearts, and we know what He will find there? We have to deal with more than our outward actions; we have to deal with our inward motives also. We must come clean, because God can't reveal His face to a partially pure Church. It would be destroyed in an instant.

God is calling people who want serious revival into a place of transparent purity. It's *you* who He's after. He wants you to draw near, but at the same time, if you come near, then He will have to deal with you. That can only mean one thing: You must die. This is the same God who told Moses, "No man has seen My face and lived." So remember to pass by the altar of forgiveness and sacrifice on your way into the Holy of Holies. It's time for us to lay our egos on the cross, to crucify our will, to lay our own agendas aside.

God is calling you to a higher level of commitment. Forget the plans you've made for yourself and lay on His altar and die to self. Pray, "God, what do You want me to do?" It's time to lay everything aside and cover yourself in the blood. Nothing alive can stand in His presence. But if you're dead, then He will make you alive. So all you need to do is die if you really want to get into His presence. When the apostle Paul wrote, "I die

daily," he was saying, "I enter into the presence of God every day" (see 1 Cor. 15:31b). Run in, don't run away! *hmm*

### Endnotes

1. See 1 Pet. 2:9.

2. Let me hasten to add that my statements here are *not* meant to imply that I feel the Bible is unnecessary or irrelevant, or anything less than the anointed, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. My purpose here is to caution Christians against the practice of reading the Bible in a permanent state of "past tense" perspective. "Look what God did *back then* with *those people*. Too bad He doesn't do that today with us." God's Word is a road map to something greater—the *God of the Word*. Sometimes I think we almost fall into idolatry when we tend to worship the Word of our God more than the God of the Word.