

A Thumb In My Back



A Personal Testimony By B.R. Hicks

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Everyone's life is a plan, a span of time between two Eternities, carefully plotted by an Omniscient, Omnipotent God. When God sends an individual into this world, He gives that individual his own talents and abilities. Then, God places that individual into just the niche that he has been ordained to fill. As man goes through life, he finds that within his niche has been placed a special pair of scales which measures out life's pleasure and pain in the exact amounts needed to bring him to God and to perfect him in Jesus Christ.

The majority of people go through life without truly understanding the painful circumstances or even the pleasurable situations into which they have been plunged. When pain comes, they may become embittered, hardened, or disillusioned, and accuse God of being unjust, unfaithful, unloving or even non-existent because they cannot accept the pain that God weighs out in order to bring each of them into a close, personal relationship with Him. Or God may bless people in order to show His love and desire to draw them to Him. In whatever way God approaches us, it is His Mercy and Concern that push us toward Him, and push us He does!

God dealt with me, personally, for many years before I recognized that the "push" in my life was His big Thumb of Mercy prodding me, thrusting me, goading me with pain, and sometimes with pleasure, into paths that led me at last into a more intimate, glorious, satisfying, and fulfilling relationship with Him than I had ever dreamed possible for a mortal being to experience. The darkness, the despair, and the intense pain that I endured, both physically and emotionally — these all were preparing me for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a life of service to God. However, for years I was too blind to see that the pressure in my life was His Thumb in my back. I could not escape the feel of it, but it took no form nor shape until I began to walk in His Will. Then, I saw how good, how gracious, how sweet was every ounce of pain that God had put in my scales because each weight brought me closer to Him.

— The Author

A Thumb in My Back

(A personal testimony from the life of Rev. B. R. Hicks)

The events of my childhood seem to have transpired only yesterday as I think back upon them. At first the scales in my particular niche of life measured out great pleasure. I had a wonderful father who was very well-off financially. World War I had ended, so we were entering a period of peace as a country. We had a beautiful home in Warren County, Kentucky. We had Christmas trees, toys, and all the things a little girl's heart could desire. Then, suddenly, the scales in my life were filled with heaps of pain. The pain continued mounting for years until it seemed as though it never would cease.

I was too young to understand that my father, John William Richards, had gone bankrupt during the famous financial crash of the twenties. All I knew was that I saw the faces of my parents change into drawn, sad faces as we were leaving our beautiful home. After that, instead of having beautiful new toys, I had dolls that were figures I cut from catalogs, or I found broken pieces of wood and dressed them in pieces of old material, making believe that they really were dolls. And I used broken bits of glass as play dishes in my imaginary, beautiful house.

Later, when I was five years old, my little brother Billy was born. Because my father had been able to save only one small farm during the financial crash and because he no longer could afford to hire help, my mother had to go with him to the fields to help with the work. My older sister was sick with tuberculosis; consequently, I was left (at five years of age) to baby-sit my little brother and clean the house. I had to stand in a chair in order to wash dishes. But by the time I was seven years old, I had learned to cook simple meals and make biscuits.

At this time, I did not realize that poverty was God's invisible Thumb pushing me into a life devoid of riches so that I, first of all, might learn to know Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and that I might endeavour to seek Him and the riches of His Kingdom before He added material things back into my life. Contentment with makeshift things was a lesson I had to learn before I could completely please God, and He was faithful to teach me by stripping my family of earthly wealth.

In addition to our loss of wealth, I also encountered my first experience with death while I was still very young. When my beautiful sister, who was two years older than I, was dying, I was called to her bedside just in time to see her rise up on her knees and hold up her hands and say, "Jesus is coming for me." Before she closed her eyes in death, she turned to our father and said, "Will you meet me over there?" This made both a lasting imprint and impression about Jesus upon my six-year-old heart. I knew by my sister's expression as she died that Jesus must be a wonderful Person to know.

Pain continued to be weighed out in my scales. Since we were wretchedly poor, we were inadequately clothed and fed. I was always ashamed of my second-hand dresses and the dried biscuits I carried to school, while other children were richly blessed with delicious lunches, such as peanut butter and crackers.

Again, these circumstances were God's big Thumb in my back preparing me for enduring a life of self-denial through fasting and prayer in order that I, as His servant, might please Jesus Christ. It is difficult to feel sincere appreciation for having just the bare necessities of life unless one has experienced real deprivation.

In the later years of my life, recalling my lack of common, everyday food during childhood made me realize how superfluous and unimportant were the delicacies of life. Although I developed a tremendous appreciation for — and a driving ambition to gain — the finer things of life, I was able to deprive myself, willingly, of these extra pleasures when God called me to a life of fasting and prayer, for I was able to weigh out the importance of gaining the spiritual Bread of Truth against having an abundance of good things to eat in the natural realm.

Living in poverty served to strengthen my endurance to do without luxuries. On the other hand, once I had attained a higher standard of living as an adult, the sacrifice I had to make in order to fast often and to pray a lot became greater because I had learned and realized, through the enjoyment of my newly found material blessings, just how much I had missed as a child.

Many vivid incidents stand out in my memories of the past. I clearly remember that, one day, in the midst of my dark, dismal existence, I received a beautiful puppy as a gift. What a joy he brought to my young heart! My favorite game to play with him was to tie a long string on our hammock swing, which hung between two big oak trees; then, I would take a flying leap into the hammock and swing while I watched my new friend race back and forth as he tried to catch the string.

Unfortunately, I had not had him very long when a car drove past our house one day, and my dog ran out to bark at it. The car stopped, and a man got out. To my horror, he snatched my little bundle of joy from before my eyes and carried him away. I cried for days because my only source of pleasure was gone. Nevertheless, I learned that I could continue to live after a most precious thing had been snatched out of my heart.

God did not send pain all the time. Along the way, He added some pleasure to my scales to make up for the pain, even when I was a child. I had enjoyed the pleasure of owning my puppy for a little while. And I always shall remember a nice neighbour lady who gave me a beautiful, yellow handkerchief. It was the first one I ever had owned, and I was so thrilled that I could hardly wait to get to school to share my great treasure with my friends. To me, the yellow colour of my new handkerchief was breathtaking; also, the colourful, skillfully embroidered flowers on it were so lovely. The next morning, clutching my yellow handkerchief, I started my long ride to school. Along the way, I suddenly became aware that it was gone. It had disappeared! Although I retraced every inch of my journey, I never found my highly prized treasure — my yellow handkerchief. Thus, it seemed that I never was destined to keep, for very long, anything that brought great joy and pleasure to me.

God had His valuable lessons of Mercy to teach me in these incidents, too. His gracious, invisible Thumb always pushed me away from my sources of earthly creature-pleasures. As I grew older, I began to understand that the temporal, pleasurable things of this life always flee away. They soon fade, wither, and pass away like the fragrant, beautiful flowers of summer. Although worldly pleasures are exotic and sweetly perfumed for a few moments, they soon lose their brilliance and freshness. Then, they crumble, turning into soon-forgotten, scentless fragments, shattering like a dried bouquet when it has been drawn from between the pages where it has been pressed, leaving only a faded memory of its original beauty. God said that at His Right Hand are pleasures *forever-more!* How I thank Him for His great Thumb that faithfully has guided me to His true, eternal pleasure in the LORD Jesus Christ.

When I was seven years old, my father became ill with tuberculosis. After he had lost his health, we all tried to help him with his work. He taught me how to ride the cultivator, which was pulled by a team of horses, so that I could cultivate the new corn. It was a great problem for me to keep the horses from eating the corn before me and the cultivator from cutting down the corn behind me. Yet it was a great experience for me in learning perception and control, both of which proved invaluable to me in later years.

A couple of years after he had become ill, my father died. Again, the terrors of death haunted my young heart as I watched my father die in a pool of his own blood. As he desperately looked up into my mother's face, I heard him say, "I don't know where I'm going. I'm afraid." Then, he was gone, but his dying words left a deep and lasting image in my soul.

Beginning with my sister's death, and now continuing with the most agonizing, painful separation from my beloved father, God's big Thumb worked to separate me from my family, member by member. Still, He was preparing me for His Purposive Will in my life, although I was unaware of His secret Workings. I did not know that God's Master Plan for my life included future years of study and prayer — years in which I, all alone with the LORD, would be forced to pursue my quest for understanding and knowledge of God's Word. I was completely unknowledgeable that in the future I would be separated from family and friends and that, for a season, there would be no one with whom I could share my love for studying God's Word and my love for praying in my prayer closet. Nevertheless, God knew His Master Plan for my life, and He was faithful to put my soul upon His anvil and continually use the hammer of pain and pleasure to fashion me according to His Purposive Will.

God knew that after I was saved, by Christ's Gift of Grace, He would call me to spend many, many hours in prayer and in the study of His Word because it was necessary for my spiritual growth so that I could minister as a lowly servant in His vineyard. Thus, through these painful separations, God's Thumb was creating a vacuum in my life that could be filled only with His Spirit and His Word.

After my father's death, which occurred when I was nine years old, my life was more poverty-stricken than ever. All the family had to work harder to try to grow food. It fell my lot, since I was the oldest living child, to learn how to use a corn knife that was almost as large as I. My job was to cut the dried stalks of corn and carry them to be stacked in a "shock" for winter fodder for the cows. The razor-sharp edges of the dried blades of corn always cut my arms and legs, and I sometimes fell on the sharp stubble of the cornstalks that were left after the harvest.

Nevertheless, in spite of all our hard work, our food supply dwindled away more and more during the Great Depression. I continually experienced having my stomach gnaw with the pangs of hunger. Stopping by the homes of friends as I returned from school was a special treat because I got to see the big pot of beans, the fragrant pans of cornbread, the luscious baked sweet potatoes, and the other mouth-watering goodies that were placed on their dinner tables. I secretly wished that our table would look like this when I arrived home. However, I always was too proud to tell my friends that I was hungry and that I would be fortunate to have a piece of cold bread waiting for my

dinner.

This was when I first began to learn how to use my mind to meditate because I spent the rest of my journey home mentally picturing all the nice things I would like to eat. Of course, when I arrived at home, I was faced with the cold, naked reality of near starvation.

This, too, was God's Thumb preparing me, through circumstances, to become the vessel He could later use.

The LORD kept His invisible Thumb painfully pressed into my back, which I did not like and could not appreciate because I did not know that it was His way of pushing me ever closer to Jesus Christ. However, after I had been saved and after I had begun earnestly to study God's Word, I really appreciated the way He had taught me to exercise my mind by meditating upon the things I longed for but did not have. Seeing the delicious food upon my friends' tables when I was so hungry developed a capacity within me to visualize clearly what I so desired. This experiential knowledge in contemplating and reflecting upon the invisible was an invaluable help to me in studying and memorizing God's Word after I had become a born-again Christian.

The most desolate, depressing, unforgettable day of my life came when I was eleven years old. The dark, dreary gloom of the overcast sky matched the dark clouds of fear, terror, and sadness that clothed my soul as I stood in the train station with my mother, my two little brothers, and my baby sister, waiting for the train to arrive that was to carry me and my siblings away to an orphans' home. All too soon, the train arrived, and my mother boarded us, said goodbye, and sent us, unescorted, to an orphanage in Louisville, Kentucky, which to me seemed endless miles away.

The fear of the unknown, the terror of the uncertainty of our welfare, the heavy weight of the responsibility of my little brothers and my baby sister upon my young shoulders seemed more than I could bear. The pain in my soul during that long ride can never be expressed. I constantly had to hide the hot tears that kept spilling from my eyes and falling down my cheeks. I kept telling myself that I had to be strong for my brothers' and my sister's sake.

My little brothers were full of fears, so they kept asking me questions: "What is an orphans' home? Will they be good to us there? Will we have food? Who will know us when we get there? How will we find the orphans' home? What will we do if we can't find it?"

These unanswered questions were mine, too. However, I bravely tried to pretend I knew all the answers, so I consoled them by saying, "An orphans' home is a place for children like us. Everyone in the home will be nice to us. Sure, we will have good food to eat. Everything will be all right. I'll find the orphans' home. Don't you worry."

Upon our arrival at the Louisville train station, a beautiful lady with bright blue eyes and glistening silver hair met us to take us to the orphans' home. After she had fed us, she led us to our rooms on separate floors in the home.

The next years of my life were spent in this orphanage. Very soon after our arrival, my sister was adopted; and shortly after, one of my two brothers was adopted. My other brother ran away from the home. With my sister and both of my brothers gone, I was left by myself — horribly alone!

But, in His Mercy, God gave me favour with my matron. Since I had been working hard from the time I was five years old and knew how to apply myself to work, I always was chosen to help the matron clean her apartment and work in her flower beds in the spring, summer, and autumn.

It did not take a long time for me to perceive, however, that many people at the orphanage envied and hated me. For instance, I quickly realized that the lady superintendent of the home and some of the children literally hated me without a cause. Although, on a daily basis, different ones told lies about me, hoping the matron would punish me with a beating, my beloved matron always seemed to read the truth in my eyes. Consequently, I never received the intended daily beatings. Instead, she continued to have me do her special work.

Each night, after I had crawled into my little cot at the end of the long dormitory, I would turn my face to the wall and weep bitterly. I longed for my family, and especially did I desire to see my precious old grandmother who, because she continually had such a beautiful, personal experience with Jesus Christ, was a bright, shining light in my life. Her exemplary life had made an eternal imprint and impression upon my young heart concerning the reality of a personal experience with Jesus Christ.

In those agonizing, lonely moments in the darkness of the night, I would say, "God, why was I born? God, where are You? God, why am I like this? Why do some people hate me so?"

Little did I realize that this was all a part of His Master Plan for my life. God's great Thumb pushed me to more and more separations in my early experiences in life because He knew the experiences of separation to which He would bring me later, after I had been brought into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, His Son. He foreknew that there would come times in my walk with Jesus Christ that I would have to walk on all by myself, totally separated from family, friends, and social contacts of any kind. Could I have done this and met God's requirements if He had not prepared me in advance with the experiences of these painful separations? No, because each one of my past burdens and painful experiences laid down some solid stones in the foundation of my character for the loads that I

would have to carry in the awesome ministry that the LORD would place upon me in the future.

Since the reward for diligent work is more work, the burdens get heavier as a person progresses in God's Master Plan and Purposive Will. It follows, naturally, that as one's work for the LORD prospers, one's work load increases. Nevertheless, God never puts on a person more than he is able to bear.

In my little niche of life in the orphans' home, God was faithful to balance my pain with some pleasure, although I did not yet know Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. He did not teach me everything by lessons in suffering. He also taught me through lessons in pleasure. My matron became a very special friend and "mother figure" to me. Also, many of the children adopted me as their "mother," even though I was only a child myself. At the end of the day, they gathered around me, saying, "Come on, Berniece, let's sing. Play the piano for us. Please tell us a story." It gave me joy and happiness to know and to feel that there were some who desired to be near me.

The orphanage employed an excellent, skillful music teacher who was a fine German lady. She also became my special friend, and she took much time to train me in music because she esteemed me to be a child with great talent. Consequently, I filled many lonely hours by practicing on the piano.

Unexpectedly, another great experience entered the pleasure side of my scales. I was chosen to receive a scholarship to an elite all-girls' boarding school. Here the pleasurable side of the scales seemed to outweigh the painful side. The dietitian at the school became a very precious friend of mine, as did the art teacher, who encouraged me to develop my artistic abilities. My beloved matron from the orphans' home personally supplied me with oil paints, canvas, brushes, easel, and palette board.

These art lessons were also the LORD's way of preparing me for the future so that I would be able to paint both illustrations of the different pieces of furniture in the Mosaic Tabernacle and a portrait of the High Priest, all of which are shadows and types of the LORD Jesus Christ. These paintings would become invaluable aids in presenting the Message that He would call me to preach, and they would be useful illustrations in the book that He would call me to write — *Precious Gem in the Tabernacle**— which is a study of the Mosaic Tabernacle that shows how the Tabernacle and its furnishings are shadows and types of all the believer presently can find spiritually in the LORD Jesus Christ. Apart from their future benefits, I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of the lessons that taught me more about music, art, etiquette, and many of the finer things of natural life.

After finishing high school and business college, I decided to organize an all-girls' dance orchestra, which became very successful. We were in demand to play for private parties, country club dances, style shows, and other social functions. However, as usual, I seemed to be a misfit. I enjoyed playing music and dancing more than anything; yet, in the midst of it, I would ask myself, "Is this all there is to life?" While I was doing all these "fun" things, I felt miserable, lonely, and depressed. Something was gouging me, making me fretful, discouraged, and distracted. I could neither wiggle away from it, dance away from it, nor play loud enough to drive it away.

In my ignorance, I still did not know that "it" was God's invisible Thumb, applying pressure on my back, trying to force me to a place of surrender in which I could accept God's divine Master Plan of Salvation through Jesus Christ. I found no satisfaction in the fame and exaltation that I was receiving in the world. Popularity did not fill the void and vacancy in my life. Oh, what an eternal lesson the LORD was causing me to learn: that worldly things never can bring lasting satisfaction.

Some people come to the LORD Jesus Christ without ever having achieved a measure of worldly success; therefore, they do not know that the top of the mountain of worldly success is empty, vacant, and bare. They do not know that the most lofty things the world has to offer are unable to satisfy the deep longings of one's spirit and soul; neither are they able to prepare a person for the future world in Eternity. Consequently, when prosperity beckons these people, they defect from Jesus Christ in a vain hope of grasping worldly substances that they mistakenly think will satisfy their desires.

I always shall be eternally grateful to God that He taught me, before I was saved, that the prominence, power, possessions, and fame of this world are places of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

No, worldly success *did not* fill the longing in my heart. So I sought other answers. One day I met a young man who was a college graduate. Although he was not a born-again Christian, he did not smoke or drink. When he asked me to marry him, I accepted, thinking that at last *this* was the answer to my misery and woe.

However, I found that marriage was not the balm I needed to heal the deep wounds in my suffering heart. Finally, the pain in my life became totally unbearable, and I concluded that I had nothing for which to live. Suicide seemed to be the only solution. Why live? There were no answers for me. I was born, it seemed, to be unhappy, so why not shorten a life of sadness? But I failed in my attempt to take my own life. It seemed I could not possibly bear to live, yet I could not die. The evil force that drove me to try to take my own life was prevented from destroying me by an opposing, stronger Good Force that kept me alive. The frustrations of my empty, miserable heart had created

an agonizing situation from which I could not escape.

The lesson I learned from my fall into this caldron of troubles was that *no* relationship with *any* human being can bring lasting joy, nor can it fill the empty place in the heart that God has prepared for Himself.

God's faithful Thumb in my back thrust me through experiences that cured me of my diseased perception of reality that told me an interdependence between people is able to bring true happiness. I learned that all forms of human relationships are satisfying only when they are based on a mutual dependence on the LORD Jesus Christ.

So the niche which God always pushed me toward in my life was for the purpose of bringing me to know Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. When at last I did find Him, I found the answer to all the *whys, wheres, whens, and how longs* in my life. There was simply no formation of human speech adequately all encompassing enough to express the ecstasy, the joy, the exquisite delight that I found when I surrendered my heart to Jesus Christ. My human mouth never can describe the feeling of His healing Love or the sweetness of His Mercy and Grace as His Mercy pushed back the punishment of Death and Hell that I deserved as a sinner and as His great Grace gave me His Salvation which I did not deserve, dispelling my darkness, relieving my burden of sin, and eradicating the misery of my depression. He became the satisfying Bread for my starving soul, more gratifying than the sweet potatoes and corn-bread that I, as a child, had longed for but did not have to eat.

Jesus Christ became my Source of pleasure, more joyous than the companionship of a lost puppy. His Love exalted me to a higher place of satisfaction than worldly fame. He became a closer Companion than my family members. His divine, everlasting Arms offered me the support I craved from my father who had been snatched away; His infinite Breast of Love offered me the comfort and consolation which I had been denied from my mother when she had sent me off to an orphans' home. His Dependability and Faithfulness were real when my dearest loved ones failed me.

After I came to know the Resurrected, Living Christ, the Lover of my soul, each empty, depressed, and dark place that His faithful Thumb had created in my life was filled with the sweetness of His Presence, the support of His Almighty Power, and the illumination of His Holy Word.

I first met the LORD Jesus Christ in my home in Louisville, Kentucky, while I was listening to the radio. Kate Smith was singing "God Bless America," and just the mention of God's Name brought a wave of God's Spirit upon me and an awareness that Jesus Christ had walked into my room. The LORD's glorious Presence sent such an overpowering conviction upon my heart and soul that I was forced to fall upon my knees and scream out to the LORD, saying, "God, I don't know how to receive Salvation. But, please, be merciful to me, a sinner; save me for Jesus' sake."

Right then, I heard Jesus Christ speak audibly to me, saying, "Arise and go in peace." Then, when Jesus took the burden of sin from my heart, it seemed that the burden of the whole world fell off my back and that my heart was overflowing with a peace and love that passed all understanding. Jesus continued speaking audibly to me, saying words such as these: "Stop playing in all those worldly places. Disband your orchestra. Purchase a Bible. Come and follow Me. I will show you what you must do."

Immediately, I left show business, the theaters, and all the other places of worldly entertainment in which I worked. I bought a Bible and started going to church. My husband, who was not saved, reluctantly followed me. Then, after I had spent a year in earnestly and diligently praying in my husband's behalf, he gave his heart to Jesus Christ.

After a few years had passed, God answered prayer and miraculously gave us two beautiful daughters.

The births of both my children were truly a miracle, for I had sustained internal injuries as a child that had left permanent damage to my physical being. In my early childhood, while I still was living at home with my family, I always rode a horse to school. One morning, on my way to school, the horse was extremely frightened by a car that was coming down the road. Automobiles were not a common sight in those days. So, without any warning, the horse reared up on his hind legs, and I was sent sailing through the air. I landed on my back. Although I seemed to recover, doctors later told me that the severe fall I had received at that time had left me with injuries that would prevent me from ever being able to bear children.

To me, a home never seemed complete without little ones, so I prayed earnestly that the LORD would grant me the privilege of having children of my own. How completely He answered my prayer for, when our first baby was born, I was elated to find that the LORD graciously had given me my heart's desire. Beverly, as we named her, was not only the daughter I had prayed for, but she had the red hair and brown eyes which I had wanted. A few years later, I again earnestly prayed for another little girl. This time I wanted one with brown hair and brown eyes. Again, He graciously answered my prayer and gave me a little girl whose brown hair and eyes were exactly what I had requested. We named our second daughter Barbara. Those who knew about my prayers for my two girls always said

that God had made them to order.

What more could I ask or want? Now that I was settled in a Christian home with my husband and two lovely daughters, I thought I would be able to enjoy a real home for the first time in my life. I imagined I would live just for myself, while serving the LORD a little bit on the side. However, with a breathtaking suddenness, Jesus Christ appeared to me and miraculously called me “to teach and preach His Word in all the world and to perfect His saints.”

My heart was rent and torn as I rebelled against the awesomeness of the whole scene. Hastily, I made a long list of excuses to present to the LORD: I was married. I had children. I did not accept women preachers; they were against my doctrinal beliefs. I did not have formal seminary training. How could I go? Where could I go? What could I say? What was the perfecting of the saints? Did the the saints not have Christ? Were they not saved? Why would God require such a strange thing out of *me*?

As these questions plagued me, and as I continued on in my rebellion, my heart was filled with frustration and despair.

Finally, after months had passed by, I was driving with my car window open when a strange-looking bug flew through the window and lit on my arm. I never had seen this particular kind of bug before, nor have I seen one like it ever again. In my desperate struggle to free my arm from this strange creature, I ran into the car in front of me. The accident did not damage the other car, but it did some severe damage to the front of the car I was driving. I rushed home to my study and prayer room and fell upon my knees and cried out to the LORD, “Oh, LORD Jesus, what are You trying to tell me? You said that all things work together for good. Therefore, I know that You have a purpose in allowing this accident.” I did not see Jesus that day, but I heard Him speaking audibly to me, as though He were leaning over the banisters of Heaven, saying with an authoritative voice, “Will you go now?”

With tears streaming down my face, I lifted up my hands and said, “LORD, I will go wherever You say. I don’t know where I can go; I don’t know how I can go; I don’t know what I can say when I get there, but I will go.”

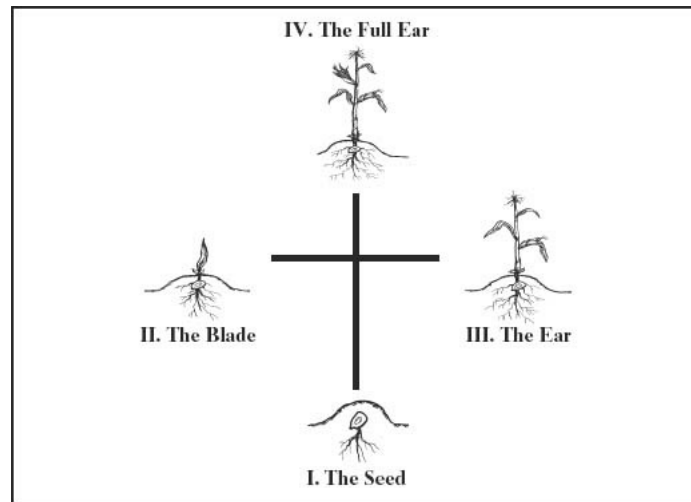
While I was waiting for the LORD Jesus Christ to explain the answers to my questions and to open a way for me to follow this strange call in my life, I felt inspired to memorize several books of the Bible. The first two I memorized were Philippians and Ephesians. After spending a lot of time meditating upon Ephesians 4:11-15, I sought counsel from many pastors as to the Truth of these verses. But searching for understanding from human creatures proved fruitless, so I returned to my LORD, the Creator, beseeching Him to reveal the mysteries of growing up to Christ’s Headship and laying hold of the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ.

Then, finally, the LORD Jesus Christ opened the eyes of my understanding and enlightened my heart to see that spiritual perfection is growing in the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ until one reaches full-grown spiritual maturity in Him.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:** That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Following this bit of enlightened understanding of God’s Word about growing spiritually in the Stature of the LORD Jesus Christ, the LORD revealed to me, as described in the Gospel of Mark, the four degrees of spiritual growth: (1) the seed; (2) the blade; (3) the ear; and (4) the full ear.

(See drawing on following page.)



And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and **the seed** should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first **the blade**, then **the ear**, after that **the full corn in the ear**. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come (Mark 4:26-29).

Since this booklet is a personal testimony rather than a teaching tool, I will not devote more space to the subject of the four degrees of spiritual growth. However, a more complete study of this subject can be found in my books entitled *The Need For Spiritual Growth* and *Secrets To Spiritual Growth*.*

The revelation of growing into full spiritual maturity, from the seed-stage of Truth to the final, full-ear-stage of Truth, was one of the first revelations I discovered as the result of my labours in fasting, study, and prayer, after I had been saved. Although I now understood the meaning of the term “the perfecting of saints,” I continued to struggle over the fact that I was a woman, and women were supposed to be silent in the church — or so I believed at that time because I did not understand what Paul had written in the second chapter of First Timothy.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (I Timothy 2:12).

As I studied the original Greek text, new light began to penetrate my darkened understanding, and Paul’s message became clear as the Holy Spirit began to reveal the Truth to me. The word *teach* is used in this verse, referring to those who try to enjoin their opinions, their ordinances, and other related ideas upon others. The word *usurp* is used when one acts of *oneself*, acts on his *own*, uses his *own* authority, becomes an absolute master, governs, or exercises dominion. With this new light, I began to realize that what God actually forbade a woman to do was to exercise her *own* ideas, opinions, and fleshly authority. But, if I, a woman, would yield to Jesus Christ and His Truth and let *Him* speak through me, it would not be *I* who spoke, but the man *Christ Jesus*. I would merely be the vessel the LORD would use to bring His Word to others. As long as I stayed a surrendered vessel, I would not be usurping a man’s authority.

I received further light on the subject of women speaking in the church when I diligently studied First Corinthians, chapter fourteen.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: **for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.** **What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?** (I Corinthians 14:34-36).

To unravel the mystery of these verses, it was necessary to understand that in I Corinthians 7:1, the Apostle Paul began to answer the questions which the believers in the church at Corinth had asked when they had written to him.

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman (I Corinthians 7:1).

The understanding of Paul’s instruction to the church came when I was able to separate Paul’s *answers* from the Corinthians’ *questions*, which Paul related in his letter when he answered them. Paul answered their question in chapter seven, which he had put in the form of a *statement* in verse one, by responding with the statement he made in verse two. Paul *did not* say that it was good for a man *not* to touch a woman; he was enumerating the church’s

questions on the things that were unclear to them. Paul answered their confessed confusion by saying in verse two: "...let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

This repeated pattern of restating the question and, then, giving the answer solved the mystery of verses thirty-four and thirty-five of chapter fourteen also. Paul quoted their stated confusion in verses thirty-four and thirty-five; then he answered in verse thirty-six: "What?" In other words, "Where did you get the idea that the Law says that women are not to speak? Quite the contrary." Paul went on to ask, "[C]ame the Word of God *out from* you [men]? Or came it *unto* you only?"

Through his questions to the men in the Corinthian church, the Apostle forced them to acknowledge that God's Word neither originated from them nor came only to them.

After God's Spirit had enlightened my mind on this point, I also understood that some passages in the Bible that appeared to be contradictions were not contradictory at all. An old Jewish translation of the Holy Scriptures by Isaac Leeser reads this way in Psalm 68:11: "The LORD gave happy tidings; they are published by the *female messengers*, a numerous host." Now, I began to see that the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul did not give contradictory information at all.

Neither were the many other statements in the Bible contradictory that said: "Ye may *all* [male and female] prophesy one by one,..." (I Corinthians 14:31); "For by one Spirit are we *all* [male and female] baptized into one body [Jesus Christ]..." (I Corinthians 12:13). There are no paralyzed, inoperative members in Christ's Body; neither is there male or female. For ye are *all one* in Christ Jesus, so said Paul (Galatians 3:28).

Praise the precious Name of the LORD! At last the mental storm on the sea of my soul had been quieted. All I had to do now was to allow Christ to crucify and mortify the flesh of my old heart; to feed on the daily Bread of Truth that Christ served me from His Word; to wait for Christ to give the spiritual growth and increase in His Stature within my heart; and to wait for my LORD Jesus Christ to arrange everything else that was involved in His call on my life.

At last, I understood why there were so many female missionaries sent out, even by churches who maintained that women should be silent. I saw the proud hypocrisy of the whole thing. While a woman was not esteemed worthy to minister to an *American* man, she could go and minister to a *heathen* man in another country. How blind is pride!

So my spiritual growth continued as I sought to understand the Truth of God's Word. I had experienced the overwhelming relief of having the burden of the penalty of Death and Hell lifted from my heart. I was also experiencing Christ's daily crucifixion and mortification of my old heart. Now, I was to experience receiving the miraculous Baptism of the Holy Ghost, even though I knew absolutely nothing about it beforehand. I was alone in my study, seeking Jesus Christ and His Word of Truth, when He appeared to me and baptized me with the Holy Ghost and Fire.

I spoke in different languages for over three and a half hours, as I was submerged in the Power, Glory, and Ecstasy of the Holy Ghost. I could hear the differences in the languages as I spoke first in one tongue and then another. No one had ever told me about the reality of the Holy Ghost Baptism; however, Jesus Himself came and instructed me.

After I had received the Holy Ghost, the seed-stage of the work began that Jesus had said I would do. I was asked to teach a Sunday School class that only two students were attending.

At this time, Jesus Christ made a covenant with me that if I patiently would seek to know His precious Word and allow Him to be the Governor and Guide of His Word, He always would send people to fill any place in which I ministered. So one pupil came, then another, and another, and so the LORD's Work grew that He had appointed me to do.

Soon the seed-work flourished into the blade-stage of development. God again worked miraculously and gave us (my small group of followers and me) the opportunity to start a work for Him in Mexico, under the direction of Dr. Graciela Esparza. Sister Esparza began her ministry by going from door to door, for which she received the humble salary of \$50.00 a month. In a short span of time, she had won many souls to the LORD, and a "mother" church was born in Mexico.

Hard financial times made it difficult for us to have faith in God for even the fifty dollars a month. We kept the money in a shoe box in the home of our secretary and treasurer; then, at the end of the month, we carefully counted it. Often the funds we had collected would be insufficient. But, by faith, we would place the money back in the box; then, we would fast and pray and wait on God. The next time we took the box off the shelf to count our money, we would find that the LORD miraculously had increased it to the needed amount. Our shoe box was like the widow's barrel in the midst of famine. The LORD honoured our faith by supplying our need.

After the work in Mexico had grown to a considerable size, I was privileged to go and minister there. Sister Esparza and I saw literally hundreds and hundreds saved and filled with God's Holy Spirit at this time. Many people were healed; miracles were performed; and on one occasion, a dead baby was brought back to life.

My fleshly pride began to rise over the accomplishment of such great feats. I thought, "Finally, I am ready. I really can work now. I believe I actually can turn the world upside down." Fortunately, God always knows the Truth. So through circumstances, He forced me back to fasting, spending hours in my prayer closet, and studying His precious Word. The LORD knew that I needed more crucifixion of the big "I."

The blade of Truth in my own spiritual growth needed to make the transition into the ear-stage of Truth before the LORD's Work that He planned to do through me could grow. The LORD was faithful to see that His Work through me did not outgrow my personal spiritual growth in His Stature. The LORD's Calling for me was to perfect His saints, so how could I lead them into greater Spiritual Stature if I had not advanced beyond the blade-stage of spiritual growth?

Gradually, the ear-stage of Truth began to grow in my own soul; therefore, correspondingly, the LORD's Work grew. We established a mission in our home city of Louisville, Kentucky; we preached in jails, on street corners, in unwed mothers' homes, in penitentiaries. We held all-night prayer meetings, visited hospitals, sanitariums, and increased our support of foreign missions to include other countries.

I was surrendered always to work in these humble places, if this were God's Purposive Will for me. Lifting up my voice on the street corner to declare Christ's Word of Truth never failed to bring me special spiritual joy because I knew that Jesus loved *all* people and had given Himself for them. It was my privilege to see many precious souls publicly bow their knees on the street corner and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. What a joy!

However, it was not God's Purposive Will for me to stay permanently in this particular phase of ministry. One day the Spirit of Prophecy sent a message to me that the LORD was going to take me out of public ministry and send me to Los Angeles, California. I was told that I would live in the south part of the city and that I would not become acquainted with anyone until I had written three books. The LORD gave me the titles of the books I would write. The first book was to be called *Precious Gem in the Tabernacle*; the second book was to be called *The Powerful Voltage of Christ's Humility*; and the third book was to be entitled *Springs in the Valley*.^{*} Both of the first two books have been in print many years and have blessed people around the world with their messages of Truth. However, only the first volume, of what will be three volumes at its completion, has been published of the third book, although it did appear in the "Christ Gospel Messenger" — a magazine published by the world-wide organization that has grown out of my work for the LORD.

Following this prophecy, I again questioned the LORD, saying "LORD, how can You do this? I am a married woman, and my husband already has spent several years as a superintendent with his insurance company. There is no way he will leave his good position in Kentucky to go to California. Moreover, his company has neither a business nor offices in California, so he *never* will go there."

In spite of my questioning flesh, the "ear" of Truth that had been growing in my heart contained sufficient grains of faith to help me believe that God's Spirit would perform His Prophecy. So, for the next two years, the saints and I had regular times of fasting and prayer for God's Purposive Will to be done. The announcement was not unexpected, then, when my husband's company said that, having acquired some insurance companies in California, they were promoting my husband to the position of district manager in the Los Angeles area.

Upon our arrival in Los Angeles, we found that the company's office was located in the south part of the city. We proceeded to purchase a house near the office, and I spent the next years writing the three books that the LORD had commanded me to write. Thus, the prophetic message from God's Spirit was fulfilled completely.

While I was in California, I wrote newsletters in which I shared God's Word with the hungry nucleus of people I had left behind in Kentucky. I also continued, by faith, to support the missionary works we had begun. It was necessary to believe God to help me meet the need from month to month since I had no public ministry; and, miraculously, He did supply the needs so that the work kept growing.

Once I had finished writing the three books, I witnessed to a neighbourhood girl about the saving power of Jesus Christ, and I had the joy of leading her to the LORD. She brought her boyfriend to me, and he, too, gave his heart to Jesus. Then, he brought his mother, and she was saved. The mother, in turn, brought her friends, and soon my entire living room, formal dining room, and hallway were filled with hungry-hearted people who were seeking to learn how to grow in Jesus. I could see how faithful God was in fulfilling His promise to bring in hungry people to fill any place in which I ministered, as long as I was faithful to wait on Him for His precious Word that He desired for me to teach.

Soon, the Holy Spirit sent another prophetic message which said, "I am finished with you here. You will return

to Kentucky, and your permanent headquarters will be in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Then, I will begin to send you into the whole world to minister.”

Once again, I questioned the LORD, but I expressed a little more faith this time. “LORD, You know we just moved to California a short time ago. You know how much money the company spent to move us here, and there is no way the company will pay again to move us back to Kentucky. But if You say so, I know You can work the miracle.” So I prayed and believed!

Since God is All-Powerful, He certainly is able to implement His Master Plan and to perform His Purposive Will. It was not surprising, then, when my husband’s company offered him another promotion to a larger district in our home state, and, once again, they paid all our moving expenses so that we could return to Kentucky, thus fulfilling God’s Purposive Will.

By the time I had returned from California, the full-ear stage of Truth was growing in my soul; therefore, the world-wide Work the LORD had given me to do was now begun. I took the loyal nucleus of saints who had been faithful from the time of our humble beginning and rented a small place to carry on our mission work for a short season until the LORD Jesus Christ helped us purchase a church building in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Thus, our Headquarters were established in the proper place, as the LORD had foretold. With such a small, humble beginning, our world-wide ministry was launched.

Our equipment consisted of one small tape recorder and one small printing press, which helped to send out God’s Living Truths to those who were hungry for more spiritual Truth. The demands of those who were spiritually hungry and of those who were experiencing their lives being transformed by God’s quickened Word made it essential to share God’s Word by taping and printing the Message He so abundantly had given to me.

The LORD’s Work grew just as He had said it would, and soon our small church building at Chestnut and Graham in Jeffersonville was overflowing with new believers and sojourners who wished to go to the spiritual New City and be in Christ’s Bride. We were forced to move into larger quarters, which we purchased on Highway 131. Again, God kept His promise by filling this larger building also, making it necessary for us to move once more. This time, the LORD miraculously provided us with almost thirty acres of very desirable property on Highway 62, where we have built our present, permanent Headquarters.

Watching God bless His Calling and His Ministry that He has placed upon me has been and is a beautiful experience because it is evidence of His Power to implement His Master Plan and to perform what He has promised. I never have forgotten His Promises that His Ministry, through me, would flourish and grow if I would be faithful (1) in studying His Word, (2) in praying to Him, and (3) in allowing Him to be the Supreme, Sovereign Ruler over me and over the Work He had given me to do.

From the days in which I began walking in God’s Purposive Will, I have realized that the purpose of all the traumatic experiences in my life has been God’s Thumb in my back, pushing me to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and shaping me to fit into the niche He already had prepared for me as His servant. Therefore, when I look back to my years of learning in the school of suffering, I clearly see the significance of it all. It was God’s Thumb in my back that prevented me from following my pathway of death and destruction. Thanks be unto God for His faithful Thumb that has governed and guided me in His Way of Truth. I cannot praise Him enough for leading me into His eternal Love, Life, Joy, and Satisfaction.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11).

In the LORD’s Presence is full, joyful satisfaction. Worldly pleasures never fully can satisfy as does the infinite, divine Joy of the LORD’s Presence as we commune with Him.

The LORD’s Presence provides the heights and depths of joyful contentment and satisfaction. What a unique privilege to be counted worthy, in Christ Jesus, to enjoy the bliss of beholding the splendour of the LORD’s Holy Presence!

Now that my life is filled with the exciting pleasures of knowing Jesus Christ and His powerful, life-changing Truth and His great Love, my desire is to help others achieve the same lasting peace, joy, and satisfaction that I have found in Him.

Thank You, LORD Jesus, for Your great Thumb in my back that has pushed me to You!