

## **Smokey Apartments, Meridian Gladiators and Living By Faith - Part 2**

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Written and Posted 12-14-08

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*"God is NEVER late, but He passes up many opportunities to be early" - Anonymous*

In last week's letter I told about our forced move brought about by an apartment filled with smoke so toxic that it was making Gale physically ill and a management company unwilling to do anything about it. We had to be out of the apartment by Friday, December 5. At the time I wrote, we didn't know where we were going, didn't have money to move and didn't have any help to do the physical moving. Yep, we felt like an old Garfield cartoon card I once had of Garfield the cat sitting on a branch up a tree in the pouring rain, wondering if things could get worse (One of "Maurice's Maxims" is: "Things are always the darkest just before the lights really go out!"). Now I want to share "the rest of the story".

Back in July, before the whole "smoke-gets-in-your-eyes" thing began, during one of our house church gatherings, I received a strong prophetic word from one of the people present. Doug, who is usually very quiet during gatherings, was "lit up" that evening as the Holy Spirit spoke through him to several people. When my "turn" came the Holy Spirit repeated the same word to me 3 times in the course of about 5 minutes: "Tell him, My provision will go before you!" The word was very strong, and was emphasized by being repeated three times. Needless to say, we openly wondered what that was all about and what might be coming. That's the challenge with prophetic ministry: sometimes it can be very powerful - setting you back on your heels - but lacking in specifics. As we moved into Fall and the whole smoke episode began to unfold and grow, we asked our group to pray over what we were supposed to do. Were we supposed to move? And if so, where would the resources come from? In late October in one of our gatherings another prophetic person in our group (O.K., I'm surrounded by prophetic people. I feel like an orchestra leader who can't play an instrument . . . except maybe a Kazzu!) told us, "You need to start packing. You're going to be moving, and I see a picture of a house you're going to be moving into." As the month of November unfolded and we fought with the management company about solving the smoke issue, these words also "hung in the air". The challenge is always knowing when it's time to "pull the plug" and to "cast your bread" upon the waters of God's prophetic promises. And that's where we were in late November. On a humorous note, the week preceding our move, one of our intercessors (John) was praying for us when the Lord spoke and told him to stop praying. "Stop praying for this situation. I have it under control," was the gentle admonishment John received. We all got a chuckle out of the situation as John shared it with us. When the Holy Spirit says "Stop! I heard you," that's when you know you can stop praying!

For us, the "pull-the-plug-and-trust-God" moment arrived on Monday, December 1st, when the management company informed us that they were not responsible for the air quality in our (or anyone else's) apartment. I seriously considered contacting a personal injury (tort) lawyer friend of mine in town to ask him to explain the situation to the management in more proper legal language. But after prayer and consulting with our house church community, we decided that God was calling us to "pull the plug" and trust Him. That was the point at which we sent out last week's newsletter.

Gale and I have been overwhelmed by the response to last week's letter. The day after I sent it out I received a phone call from a friend of our ministry who said he had a empty house in Coeur d'Alene (Idaho - 30 minutes from Spokane) and that we were welcome to move in and live there free (it is up for sale, but in the current market, that could take a while). We were soon contacted by house church groups in Spokane, California, Vancouver (B.C.) and Oregon offering financial help. Marty McKinney, Director of Truth Ministries where I serve on the Board and feed the guys, rounded up a crew of guys to do the heavy lifting. By Friday evening, we were moved and our needs had been generously met. Gale & I spent Friday evening in a hotel (didn't think we could find the bed, although it was in the house - somewhere). We have spent the past few days unpacking, restoring "normalcy" and fighting severe head & chest colds acquired during the move ("sick as dogs" is the expression which pops to mind). Then, just as we were getting settled, our car decided to demand attention. \$500 later we are the proud owners of a new starter, a new battery and an oil-filter-lube-wiper job. As I told my wife, "Merry Christmas!"

## Reflections on Spectacles & Moving

The move is now a week behind us and we are "recovering". I'm sitting at the Kootenai Coffee Company in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho (our new home) watching it snow and mooching off of their free WiFi (can't get cable & internet hooked up at the new place until the 23rd). Now that the dust of the move is settling (covered with a blanket of fresh snow - which always makes the world look new) it's time to pause and reflect on what God is doing in our lives, and how we are responding to His dealings. So, let me venture a few observations as they relate to our collective walk of faith, particularly with respect to house church.

**What it means to live by faith.** My friend Wolfgang Simson has often observed that, in matters of finances, when it comes to "walking by faith" most of us walk by faith in our plan as opposed to faith in God's provision. We are willing to trust God for His provision so long as we can see the plan laid out before us in step-by-step logical order ("Oh, so THAT'S how He's going to do it! O.K., I'm willing to trust that."). That's how Gale & I were trained when we raised financial support many years ago for our staff work with Campus Crusade for Christ. Plan out your support raising activities. Talk to X number of qualified people, present your ministry, challenge them to support you. Then send out a regular monthly support letter to everyone you contacted during support raising. We took classes in how to do this, and financial success was to be expected. "If you work this plan consistently you should raise your needed support in six months or less," we were told. And for a generation of people in ministry this was the pattern, the "methodology" if you will, for "living by faith".

But times have changed and that methodology doesn't work any more (although many major ministries still use it). Now, with the world entering into the most severe financial downturn since World War 2, many of the plans and structures which we have created as substitutes for trusting God and His provision will prove themselves to be broken cisterns which provide no water in seasons of drought. The twenty-six-year-long financial boom which floated numerous ministries and mega-churches, is now over. Those ministries, churches and individuals which came to rely upon these methodologies during the boom years (call it "a wind which caused even turkeys to fly") are now foundering on the shoals of economic and spiritual reality. In their place I believe God is raising up a new generation of Christian leaders, particularly in the House Church movement, who are being called upon to step out and trust Him in radical obedience and faith. I am reminded of the words of A.W. Tozer:

*"What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day. For each of us the time is coming when we shall have nothing but God. Health and wealth and friends and hiding places will be swept away and we shall have only God. To the man of pseudo faith that is a terrifying thought, but to real faith it is one of the most comforting thoughts the heart can entertain."* (A.W. Tozer, "Root of the Righteous")

A couple of final points on this. **First**, as God calls some to radical sacrificial "living by faith," so too He is raising up and calling others to radical sacrificial "giving by faith". As Paul demonstrated through his own ministry, God calls both. God called Paul to "radical sacrificial living" (with occasional, temporary stints of "tent-making"), while God called the Macedonian believers to "radical sacrificial giving" (see 2 Corinthians Chapter 8). Healthy networks of house churches will experience both. Second, if you want to get a feel for how the current economic downturn is BEGINNING to affect ministries and churches, check out related posts on Andrew Jone's blog (TallSkinnyKiwi):

<http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/11/recession-proof.html>

**Waiting on God (when everyone says "get moving!").** "Wait" is a word which most western, particularly American, Christians don't like . . . or practice. Our mantra is, "Don't just stand there, do something." But the mantra of the Kingdom of God is quite different. "Be still (cease striving) and know that I am God," He quietly whispers into the storms of our lives and waits to see how we will respond. How could you or I know what God might have done in a particular situation if we hadn't gotten in His way and done it ourselves? In this way we are not unlike Saul in 1 Samuel 13. When Samuel tarried (although the seventh day had ARRIVED but not PASSED) Saul concluded that human effort was needed to make up for obvious divine deficiency, "So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:12). How might the history of Israel have been radically different if only Saul had been willing to wait upon God and Samuel irrespective of the outward circumstances which "demanded action". Throughout our experience with smoke in our apartment and facing

the prospect of a forced move, we kept asking ourselves, "What does God want us to do about this?" People around us would ask the same question, "What's your plan? Are you looking for a new place? Do you know what you're going to do or where you're going to go?" On more than one occasion I told people that God is obviously painting us into a corner with no apparent way out. So, my plan was to wait on God until He painted a door on the wall behind us and said, "Here, go this way." And that is precisely what He did. So, the next time you hear someone say, "God is in a hurry" (a phrase commonly uttered by the leader of a prominent healing ministry in Spokane), or that "God is waiting on us," do a word study on "wait" and ask yourself "Who exactly is supposed to be waiting on Who?" Having done so, I'm convinced that, in all probability, God is NOT an American Evangelical and probably wouldn't make it on the staff of the average church (too much activity; not enough waiting).

***What it means to be spectacles . . . and leaders.*** As I shared in my last (pre-move) letter, I am slowly becoming comfortable with that reality which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 4, namely, the reality that five-fold leaders are called to be "spectacles" - meridian gladiators, if you will. As such, we are called upon to regularly confront ridiculously impossible battles which we win solely because of God's faithfulness. By all outward appearance we should have died, "indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves, in order that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God Who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many." (2 Corinthians 1:9-11)

As I shared last week, we all want to be witnesses of God's power to raise the dead, but none of us really want's to be "spectacles" - those who have the privilege of suffering and dying in full view of those around us. So, why does God call His five-fold leadership to such a lifestyle of being public spectacles? Because five-fold leadership represents God's "tuning forks" in the greater body. Through them God "strikes the tone" that He wants to resonate throughout the body. Like the First Chair violinist of an orchestra, they strike the note which is then picked up and carried throughout the orchestra as it tunes itself in preparation for performing. How do we know this to be true of five-fold leadership in the Church? Because Paul as much as says so. After 13 verses of explaining the role leaders as "spectacles" and "fools," Paul writes this: "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children . . . I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me" (1 Corinthians 4: 14-16). "Be imitators of me," says Paul. "Pick up that note that God is striking in my life and let it resonate in your life, too."

***What it means to be an organic house church community.*** I recently received several e-mails asking about our "doctrinal statement" in The Parousia Network. This made me stop and think some more about doctrine and house church. Dr. Haddon Robinson once told me that doctrinal statements tend to be "conflict documents," that is, they tend to get written as the result of a conflict and a need to distinguish what one group believes as opposed to the other group. I call them "shibboleth" documents (see Judges 12:1-6), "We all say 'shibboleth' but they all say 'sibboleth'". People in search of doctrinal statements are often in search of a "shibboleth" (or a "sibboleth"). If you want to know what I believe theologically, get a copy of Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology" and read it. When you're done, if you have any left-over questions, let me know and we'll talk about them. Theology ("doctrine" or "dogma") is like the foundation of a house. A good foundation doesn't guarantee that what you build on it will be good or will last; but a bad foundation almost guarantees future problems with whatever you build upon it. Good theology doesn't guarantee a successful house church any more than a good foundation guarantees a successful house. But bad theology jeopardizes everything you and your house church seek to build on that foundation. The success of your (or any) house church will be determined by what you & I build on the good foundation we lay. And most of what is built will be "non-theological" in any technical sense. Do you love one another, even when you sharply disagree with one another? Do you bear one another's burdens non-judgmentally? Do you pray with and for one another? Do you equip and build one another up through mutual ministry and the proper exercise of all the gifts God has bestowed upon you? Do you meet one another's needs radically and financially? Do you feed the hungry, befriend the stranger, visit the prisoner, prefer one another in honor and practice the more than 30 "one another's" in Scripture? These are the building blocks of organic house church which we build upon the proper foundation of right doctrine. Without them we are little more than a bible study club, or a prophecy club, or a tongues club, or a healing club, etc. But with them, we are the living stones which God Himself is using to build a spiritual house that the New Testament calls "the ekklesia of God".

To bring this point home, Gale and I could not have accomplished this latest move without the help of an organic house church community that prayed for us, supported us financially, provided material help, offered a place to live, and more. In a very real sense, each of you who helped us are now part of our larger "organic house church community," even though we are separated by significant distances. No, we haven't signed a doctrinal statement, and I suspect we would find that there are some theological differences between us. But by our actions we are acknowledging that we are part of a larger organic body of Christ. And perhaps we are also demonstrating that in organic house church what we build upon the foundation is as important to our continued growth and success as the foundation itself.

***The power of "things"***. It was the famous medical missionary Albert Schweitzer who once observed, "If there is anything you own that you cannot give away, you don't own it. It owns you." If you really want to know what owns you, try moving. Shortly after 9/11 I heard a commentator observe that the primary cultural difference between Islam and Christianity is that Islam never "made peace with modernity (i.e., "the modern age")" whereas Christianity had "made peace with modernity" (and adopted its consumerist values). I sat stunned as the full weight of that observation sank in. Simply put, Christianity has become a fully modern, consumerist religion that is now owned by what it possesses. When the Apostle Paul died, he left behind a cloak, a tunic and a few books (2 Timothy 4:13). I suspect you and I, even in our "American poverty" will leave behind much more. And we are now owned by what we possess. I am convinced that if the Chinese authorities truly wanted to stop the Chinese house church movement in its collective tracks, the best way to accomplish that goal would be to legalize the movement and then give competing groups money and property to fight over. In less than a generation they would be as ineffective as we are, being owned by what they claim to possess.