

III

INTO THE DEEP

Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught
(Luke 5:4).

It is not at all uncommon to go to a convention and hear the words, "This program will work . . . if you will work it." Frequently, however, our programs do not work and we go back to the next convention guilt ridden and embarrassed. If only we had worked harder . . . if only we had been more diligent . . . it surely would have worked.

What we sometimes say about a program could also be said about a fishing net. "This net will work if you will work it." Every time a fisherman casts a net, he has a statistical chance of catching fish. If he is a knowledgeable fisherman, his percentages of success will probably be better than those of a novice. But, sometimes even good nets do not seem to work.

The disciples of Jesus were fishermen by trade. They had spent their lives on the Sea of Galilee. They knew when to fish, and where to fish . . . yet they had fished all night and caught nothing.

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At this point in time, the "Carpenter" told them to "launch out into the deep" for a draught.

They were extremely reluctant to do so. First of all, the night-time was the best time to fish, and it was now day. Secondly, the deep water was not the best place to fish. The shallow waters would enable them to gain the most efficient use of their net as there the weights and floats would enable them to completely trap their quarry. In the third place, a great crowd was watching and the advice to "launch out into the deep" had come from a carpenter. Finally, they had already toiled all night and taken nothing . . . their nets were washed and dried for storage . . . and they were totally exhausted.

Yet . . . at the word of Jesus, they let down their nets into the deep. . . . The catch of fish was so remarkable that it even tore their nets.

Let me suggest for your thinking that many of our present failures may not be the result of laziness and indifference. I am convinced that it is possible for us to labor all night long and still catch nothing.

Success comes when we are able to communicate with Christ!

TWO PREACHERS NAMED ROY

A number of years ago, Roy Stedman was working with a new congregation in Oceanside, California. He is a devout man who is much given to prayer. Therefore, before he began canvassing the community, he drove around praying for insight as to where he should begin.

God grants wisdom to those who ask for it . . . nothing doubting. The next day Roy parked his car and prayed that God would give him at least one good call that day.

At the third house on which he called, the lady responded: "Come right in Mr. Stedman, I just this moment got up from my knees in prayer asking God to send somebody to help me."

The skeptic will undoubtedly relegate such a story to coincidence. Brother Stedman did not think so . . . and neither do I.

Another preacher named Roy had a dramatic and similar answer to prayer. His name is Roy Weece. Roy first told me this story when he was ministering in Eldon, Missouri. He repeated it recently over KOBC, which is a 30,000 watt radio station in Joplin, Missouri. Here are notes adapted from that radio program:

Several years ago I became convinced on the basis of John 7:17 that God does give subjective evidence to the believer. This evidence will not contradict objective or revealed truth, nor will it precede our obedience to God. There must be obedience and trust in my life for this subjective evidence to occur.

Acts 8 was also intriguing to me. Philip, the Christian, was directed to the Ethiopian nobleman to tell him about Jesus and baptize him along the road. I figured that if God could lead people together in that day, I couldn't see any reason why He couldn't lead people together in this day.

So I decided to pray that God would guide me to people . . .

One example of this guidance came out west of Eldon, Missouri, in the vicinity of Versailles. I had been given the name of a man who lived in that vicinity. I had been told that he worked during the daytime and that I would have to catch him in the evening, but still I felt a strong compulsion to go down that road, and go into his yard. I had never been there before. I came up to his porch and knocked on the door and just about turned to walk away, for I just knew that he wouldn't be there.

Then the door opened, and there he stood. I introduced myself and said that I was a Christian and that I wanted to talk with him. He said, "Come right in." He took me over to a chair. On the chair was a gun. He said, "I was just seated on this chair with this gun to my temple. I had decided that life was not worth going on. Then I decided that before I did it I would try to call on God. And so I laid the gun aside, knelt down at this chair, and said, God, send somebody to help me."

It was at this point that Roy Weece knocked at the door! The man did not commit suicide, and ultimately gave himself to the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptized in a pond near his home.

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Even though suicide is in epidemic proportions here in the United States, the statistical probability that you would arrive at someone's house at the very time they were in the act of blowing their brains out is quite remote. Roy Weece is convinced that somehow, God providentially directed him to that man's home at the precise moment when he was most needed. I share this conviction.

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become fishers of men, He did so immediately following the miraculous draught of fish which these men had taken by launching out into the deep. Is it not possible that Jesus wanted to help these men catch other men with the same miraculous aid which enabled them to catch fish?

At the very time I am writing these words, my good friend, Gordon Clymer, opened the door to deliver some paper. Since he has an exciting story to share, I feel that his arrival at this time is providential.

Since Gordon is dictating this story to me now, I will record it in the first person:

Ziden Nutt and I had gone to the Dominican Republic to discuss leadership training by means of a satellite network called "Project Lookup." We had been invited by Gordon Thompson, who had previously been a missionary to Puerto Rico, but was now working in the Dominican Republic.

Since Ziden had successfully used a mobile unit to communicate the gospel in Africa, Brother Thompson expressed a strong interest in having such a unit for their work.

He and his wife served as translators for teams of American eye doctors who came regularly to the Dominican Republic. They would go into the mountain villages and treat eye infections, fit glasses, and also treat other eye disorders.

After the medical work was finished, the evenings were free for the missionaries to preach and to pass out Bibles and gospel tracts. The possibility of showing films would attract a large crowd, but the small mountain villages had no electricity. A

mobile unit, with its own generator, would provide an ideal solution to this missionary's need.

We had discussed this need all morning long, as well as the evening before. At noon, Brother Thompson received a telegram instructing him to call a supporting church in Oregon. Since he had no telephone at his residence, we went to a local hotel to make the call.

The reason for the call involved a late model International Travelall. Through the providence of God, this vehicle had been made available to the church and they were anxious to give it to the Thompsons if they had a need for it.

It was the ideal vehicle which he needed to have made into a mobil unit. That very day arrangements were made to send it to Joplin, Missouri, to the facilities of Good News Productions, International where it could be equipped with projectors, speakers, and all other necessary equipment. This vehicle, as far as I know, is still on the mission field accomplishing the very purpose that we were discussing that day.

In retrospect, it needs to be pointed out that at the time the church sent the telegram for Gordon Thompson to call, they had no concept of a mobile unit, and certainly had no way of knowing that he would at that very time be discussing such a need.

Also, we should observe that Gordon Thompson at that time had no idea that a supporting church would be given the very vehicle which he so desperately needed.

Thus, we have several facets to this amazing story. First of all, the missionary who had the need, secondly, the church which could supply that need, and finally, the man with the necessary technical experience and facilities to equip the vehicle. I believe it was God who orchestrated the entire matter, but it could not have happened if those who were involved had not responded to God's leading.

ALMOST IS BUT TO FAIL

Several years ago I was returning from a seminar with a van load of preachers. Our discussion fell to God's providential

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guidance, and a fellow preacher, whom I regard as a close personal friend, related this story. Since the story does not have a happy ending, I will not mention his name.

This man was preaching in a community where a professional women's basketball team played a game. He attended that game, and returned home after the game was over. As he prepared for bed, he felt a strong compulsion to go back to the gymnasium and preach the gospel to those women.

After some reluctance, he put his clothes back on and questioning his own sanity, returned to the gymnasium. No one was there.

The preacher, however, knew the direction they would have to travel, so he started off in that direction. Soon he arrived at a junction and was no longer certain which direction to take. He determined to go just another mile or two, and if he did not see their bus, he would go back home where he belonged.

Within the parameters of his own conviction, he saw their bus at an all night cafe. Since it was now about midnight, these girls were virtually the only ones who were there. As he opened the door and walked in, they looked his way . . . almost as if they expected him to say something to them.

At this point, with some embarrassment, the preacher confessed that he had chickened out. The whole event had seemed so bizzare and his years of conventional training and conditioning prevented him from risking the irrational.

Like any "normal" person, the preacher offered them a casual greeting, sat down and ordered a cup of coffee . . . and then went home to bed.

This event had happened years before. It was the kind of thing you have to be careful about mentioning in some circles lest people label you as some sort of a nut. Nothing of this nature had ever happened to him since that time, but I think the next time it does, this brother will rise to the occasion. Almost is but to fail!

The apostles too, could have gone home to bed where they "belonged." They didn't have to risk the embarrassment of

launching out into the deep. They could have played it safe and no one would have even known what would have happened otherwise.

But, praise God, they launched out into the deep. As irrational and embarrassing as it might have been, they rose to the occasion. Their lives were never the same. They dropped their fishing nets and followed Jesus to become fishers of men.

When you launch out into the deep and taste the victory of His miracle working power, you will never be the same again either.

The Scriptures command us to enter in boldly into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus Christ, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

IT DOESN'T SOUND RIGHT

If I were to tell you that God was able to do all that you would ask, it wouldn't sound right . . . and it isn't.

If I were to tell you that God was able to do above all that you would ask, it wouldn't sound right . . . and it isn't.

If I were to tell you that God is able to do abundantly above all that you would ask, it wouldn't sound right . . . and it isn't.

If I were to tell you that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you would ask, it wouldn't sound right . . . and it isn't.

The Scriptures actually teach that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us . . ." (Eph. 3:20).

The world's greatest power is not in man's ability to manipulate with levers . . . or to harness from nature . . . not even in the power of the atom. The greatest power in the universe is the power of God which created the atom and holds the universe together by His omnipotence.

This is the power that is available to you and to me . . . beyond the veil!

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER III

1. If you were Peter, why would you be reluctant to cast your nets into the deep?
2. Why are we sometimes reluctant today to “take a chance”?
3. Have you ever said a prayer without the slightest idea that God would answer that prayer? Why?
4. Which is more important, hard work or prayer?
5. Why did the early church set aside seven men to serve tables (Acts 6:2-4)?
6. What does it mean, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23)?
7. Have you ever felt that you “ought” to do something which you failed to do?
8. How can God guide people who will not do what they feel they ought to do?
9. What has God done in your life in the last week?
10. What would you like for Him to do?