

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKING INTO LEADERSHIP

**I believe that one's ministry should not be his life, but that one's life should be his ministry.**

For this reason, every follower of Jesus Christ is called to be in “full time ministry.” Some of us, however, have received the calling, grace and privilege to be in “full-time paid ministry.” I have spent over three decades in full-time paid ministry. During these years, I have traveled extensively, not only in the United States, but I have also made well over a hundred trips to over thirty nations on six of the seven continents. Sadly, I can testify with complete confidence that the *greatest and most frequent problem I have encountered is the lack of genuine fatherhood*. Consequently, my primary purpose for writing this book is to address this problem. My objective is to help us understand and walk down a path, which will lead us into healthier father and son relationships. As mentioned earlier, for the past thirty-five years I have been on a journey with my pastor, mentor and spiritual father Dan Wolfe. I have attempted to lead my two sons, Sean and Matt, on the same path. As I recount some of the things that I have learned along the way, I hope I can challenge you, encourage you and dramatically affect the way that you view fatherhood, sonship, family, and the church. To assist us on our journey, I will touch upon the lives of such great men as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Eli, Elijah, Samuel, David, John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul.

The scarcity of genuine fatherhood was graphically exhibited and confirmed for me in the early 1980's. However, before we look at that period, permit me to give you a little background and personal history. In 1966, I accepted a position to coach and teach in Marlette, Michigan. In July of that year, while doing graduate work at Western Michigan University, I met a nurse named Kathy Smith. Two weeks later, we were engaged to be married; yes, I did say two weeks. We were wed in November on the only weekend I had free between football and basketball season.

Kathy had met Jesus Christ as a young girl, but had not been encouraged in her faith or in her walk with God. Although I was the son of a pastor, I did not know Jesus Christ as my Savior. In April of 1968 I was dramatically converted. I made the decision to become a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Within three months of my conversion, Kathy and I were looking to relocate to another community. We call it “the week that was.” In July of 1968, in one week's time, I signed a contract to teach and coach in Marcellus, Michigan, we rented a house there, I moved our belongings, and Kathy gave birth to our first son Sean. Yes, I was a new Christian with a new job, a new house, in a new

town, with a new baby, all in a week's time. Two years later Matt was born, and that completed our family. So, this part of our journey began in Marcellus, Michigan.

Marcellus was a wonderful, safe and serene setting to raise the boys. The population of Marcellus, if you counted live pets, was perhaps 1,000 inhabitants. We joked that they could place the village limit signs back to back. Kathy, the boys and I settled down quickly into this tiny and typical Michigan community. We began to search for a church, and eventually ended up as members of a wonderful little, rural Baptist congregation. The church was very conservative; jokingly I would say, "...just to the right of the National Rifleman's Association." In due course, their doctrinal position on dispensationalism would cause us some major conflict.

As Baptists, they held the position that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased with the apostolic age. As God would have it, I was supernaturally baptized in the Holy Spirit during a meeting of the local Baptist presbytery; and then the trouble began. Our pastor received the left foot of fellowship out of the Baptist church. Reluctantly, along with a handful of families, we left the Baptist church with him. Let me make this clear that I have a great love and appreciation for my Baptist heritage. Even though my father had been a Methodist pastor, I met Christ because a Baptist pastor introduced Him to me. Something I shall always treasure is that the Baptists gave me a sincere love and respect for the Word of God.

By 1972, I had backed into pastoral ministry simply attempting to fill the role vacated by our pastor, who moved to another community. In less than four years after I had received Christ, and without the benefit of any formal training, Bible school or seminary, I inherited a small congregation. I resigned my position as a football and basketball coach in 1973, but continued teaching high school English until 1978. For me the decade of the 1970's was awesome, while at times very turbulent and unsettling.

For five consecutive years, I was elected by the students of the local high school to receive the award of Teacher of the Year. Ironically, during this time some in our community portrayed me as some kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It has been said, "What people don't understand they fear, and what they fear they fight." Rumors and gossip flourished about our little congregation mostly as a result of our charismatic beliefs, our worship style and ministry practices. We merely wished to recover and practice some of the elements of New Covenant Christianity. One principle that I teach is, "**If we can't mobilize our followers, we're probably not their leaders.**" The fact that there was a tremendous sense of commitment on the part of our congregation caused some folks in our small

town great suspicion and consternation. Some precious folks in the community were threatened by our ability to mobilize and act. It was impossible in this small village to be incognito. It is difficult for three dozen men gathering in one of the two restaurants for a fellowship breakfast to go unnoticed. Besides, as we began to help one another restore our houses, with three dozen men hammering shingles to replace a roof, it was impossible to go unnoticed. Being carefully scrutinized, we lived, so to speak, in a glass house.

During this season, we had been swept into the river of the charismatic renewal, and in particular what came to be known as the “Covenant Stream.” Thankfully, a few months prior to taking the reins of Marcellus Christian Fellowship I met Dan Wolfe. With the help of his wisdom and guidance we were able to navigate the waters of that era.

There were a number of church leaders in southwest Michigan who looked to Dan Wolfe for oversight. A local presbytery consisting of the elders of these congregations met regularly. In 1982 at the close of one of these meetings, my life took a mammoth twist. Erik Krueger, a guest at one of these presbytery meetings, led a large congregation of believers in East Lansing, Michigan. At that time both Dan Wolfe and Erik were under the personal oversight of Derek Prince. This alone would give each of them a measure of stature and credibility. I will never forget this moment. As I went to say goodbye to Erik, he said, “I’d like to speak to you.” The tone of his voice and the look on his face sobered me, and for good reason. What he had to share with me dramatically changed the course of my life. He challenged me to consider prayerfully a move from Marcellus to Benton Harbor. I am sorry to admit, even when I am certain that God is speaking to me, I do not always respond immediately in joyful submission and obedience. During the forty-five minute drive from Kalamazoo to Marcellus, I must have thought of a hundred ways to broach this subject with Kathy. As I arrived home and entered our kitchen, I was surprised to face a teary-eyed wife. Her words struck me as a bolt of lightning; “We’re moving aren’t we?” I am certain that my eyes resembled the eyes of a frog when you squeeze it.

To give you a greater insight into the trepidation I felt at that moment, let me share a couple of things. First, we had just finished the task of completely refurbishing and remodeling our home from basement to attic. Every niche and corner of the house reflected Kathy’s personal touch and taste. For us, our home was a dream come true. Secondly, not long before, Kathy and I had sat in our car parked across from G.W. Jones Exchange Bank; we had been weeping for joy. We were elated and basking in the freedom of “owing no man anything.” We were debt free! Our automobile, our

mortgage, our newly remodeled house, yes everything was paid off. Selling our house, packing up and relocating were the furthest things from our mind.

What's more, in 1982 Benton Harbor was receiving national media coverage as the single most impoverished city in the United States. The vast majority of the downtown store windows were covered with plywood. Weeds flourished at the base of metal pipes that previously held parking meters. The cracked and potholed cement of empty streets and parking lots were littered with empty cans, plastic bags, and yellowed newspapers. What once had been a popular harbor and resort city nestled on the shores of Lake Michigan, now appeared like a grey concrete skeleton. Days later, when Kathy and I drove through the downtown on our very first visit, the Scripture that occupied my mind was the account of the valley of dry bones. I had the impression that God was asking me, "Can these dry bones live again?" Reminiscent of Ezekiel, I answered cautiously, "*Only you know Lord!*"<sup>1</sup> Kathy and I had come face to face with God's desire to strengthen the weak, the poverty-stricken and the disenfranchised. This only made it more evident to us that the idea of relocating to Benton Harbor came from our heavenly Father.

After a time of seriously seeking the Lord, discussing and praying with Kathy and the boys, and making numerous phone calls to Dan Wolfe, I succumbed to the obvious as the inevitable. Somewhat resembling the experience of Israel in the wilderness, I knew the cloud of His presence was moving for us. Kathy and I announced to the congregation our decision to move our family to Benton Harbor.

By this time, the Marcellus congregation had grown to represent around forty households. Imagine my alarm, dismay and apprehension when one by one the members of the congregation began to make known to Kathy and me their intentions to relocate with us. Between 1982 and 1987, nearly every one of these forty households moved to the Benton Harbor area. Take a moment simply to consider the logistics of selling that many homes in a town of a thousand people that had no industrial base or job market. Then consider the dilemma of finding housing and new jobs in our nation's most impoverished city. Amazingly, we experienced God's supernatural intervention almost daily during this period of transition.

Let me attempt to illustrate what this move was like. A few years ago, my oldest brother's wife Betty Jo underwent surgery for a liver transplant. I vividly remember standing in the intensive care unit of a Florida hospital with my brother Dick looking at Betty Jo. Her face was grey, her breathing was labored and her heartbeat was faint. Tubes and electrical cords hung from her frail body like so

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 37:3

many threads from a pair of worn out jeans. With the surgery completed, all we could do was to hope and pray that she would survive such an insult and trauma to her body. For me, transplanting the congregation from Marcellus to Benton Harbor could be likened to a congregational heart transplant. At first, it appeared that the transplant was an absolute success. Eventually, we saw how weak, delicate and frail one who undergoes a transplant could be. Tearfully I watched men and families, that we had walked with for over a dozen years, lose heart. As the storms mounted in our new environment, many were unable to find their bearings; they slipped from the deck of our fellowship and plunged into the raging waves of disillusionment. I am certain that a more capable captain could have navigated these troubled waters more skillfully. Perhaps a more seasoned professional than I could have saved more of these people. To this day, I often think back with pain and sorrow about those precious people who at one time had been so vibrant, so valiant, so dedicated and focused, who were unable to survive the trauma of the transplant.

In 1987, in an effort to help Dan Wolfe establish a church plant in Reston, Virginia, Kathy and I, along with the boys, left the congregation of Benton Harbor in the capable and skilled care of Dan and Glenda Head. More than two decades have passed since then, and I remain forever grateful for the selfless leadership of Dan and Glenda, who have painstakingly cared for those who did survive. Thanks to them, and several other courageous families, Covenant Christian Church of Benton Harbor, Michigan lives on. Oh, by the way, with tremendous gratitude to God our Father, Betty Jo survived the liver transplant and to date, along with my brother Dick, she has continued to lead an active life.

Perchance you are curious as to why I would share the above in a book about restoring fathers and sons. The answer is simple. I wanted to dispel any preconception that the boys had grown up in some kind of “greenhouse atmosphere.” It has been said, **“Anyone can steer a ship on a calm sea.”** Yes, Sean and Matt spent their early and formative years in Marcellus. However, when our family moved to Benton Harbor, Sean was in the eighth grade and Matt was in the sixth grade. Benton Harbor High School alone had more students than the entire population of Marcellus. The overwhelming majority of the population of the city of Benton Harbor, and therefore the schools, were African-American. Matt was the only Caucasian in his sixth grade class. A couple of years later, he was the only white kid on the football team. Amusingly, his teammates nicknamed him “Ghost”. Many of the Sean and Matt’s classmates were members of street gangs. Illegal drugs were readily available, and were regularly used inside the school building. Having been a teacher and an assistant

principal responsible for school discipline, I could not imagine working in this kind of environment. Uniformed guards, including city police, roamed the hallways to quell the frequent fistfights. There were incidents of gunfire in the halls. A murder took place in broad daylight in the school parking lot. The junior high principal told me that fifty per cent of his students would drop out of school before their senior year graduation. In this setting, Sean graduated in the top ten of his class, but when I mention it, he smiles and rolls his eyes. Our home was within four blocks of the high school, and on any given day, we would find kids skipping school to play basketball in our driveway.

No, Sean and Matt were not home schooled, neither did Kathy and I send them to a private school or Christian school, not that I am against these alternatives. Perhaps if we had, it would have afforded them a much better academic education, but I doubt that they would have learned more about real life. Therefore, when I speak about Sean and Matt throughout the book, you now have a little insight into their journey. The same God, who can make a stream flow from a rock, can create a garden in a desert.

In 1987 Kathy, Sean, Matt and I moved to Reston, Virginia. Sean had just graduated from high school, and Matt would finish his final two years at Herndon High School in Virginia. For six years, I served as an assistant to Dan Wolfe on the pastoral staff of New Covenant Christian Church. During this period, I was privileged to serve on the staff of Intercessors for America. Soon, I began to travel and minister with my good friend Gary Bergel, the president of Intercessors for America. Gary opened the door for me to do a number of healing seminars, under the banner of I.F.A. This would be the spark, which was to ignite Jim McNally Ministries, currently known as Harvest International Ministries.

I thoroughly enjoyed sharing with people about physical healing, and I have been privileged to witness numerous miracles. The healing or gift of faith that God gave me opened up many doors. In nearly every place I went, I tried to encourage and equip the audience to exercise “the power of the casual touch.” I had come to believe that there is little evidence that Jesus prayed for the sick. In nearly every incident of healing recorded in the Gospels, Jesus simply touched those afflicted. So, that is what I did, and challenged others to do the same. But, I never felt that the ministry of healing was my true passion. Whenever I had opportunity to do so, I would steer private conversations with anyone who would listen toward the subject of sonship and fatherhood. This was the subject that truly captivated my mind and heart. I now believe that God used this gift to confirm this message.<sup>2</sup> As a

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 14:3

result of sharing this message at home and abroad, I began to receive requests to be a spiritual father to various leaders around the world.

In 1990, Sean married Wendy Carder and the two of them relocated to Virginia Beach. They worked with a church affiliated with “People of Destiny.” The church had a large youth ministry and Sean and Wendy had been targeted as potential leaders for it. In 1991 Bob Hughes, the youth pastor, asked Sean this question: “If you could do anything with your life, what would that be?” Sean answered, **“I would work in the ministry with my dad.”** Bob’s sagacious response was, “Well, that’s what you need to do then.” This meeting prompted Sean and Wendy to attempt to move to Reston, but housing costs in Northern Virginia made this impossible. Having exhausted every possibility of relocating nearer Kathy and me, in time Sean and Wendy were able to purchase a small home in Stafford, Virginia, about fifty miles south of Reston. Still they quickly became the youth leaders at New Covenant Christian Church, commuting over an hour each way to do so. Eventually, it became increasingly apparent that working with the youth in Reston was not a viable option.

Finally, in 1993 New Covenant Christian Church faced the need to downsize its leadership. I looked at the situation as a boat with too many captains and not enough passengers. Someone needed to take the plunge, and I felt that someone was “yours truly.” Therefore, in April of 1993 along with Kathy, Sean, Wendy and Matt as my apostolic team, we ventured out to plant a congregation in Stafford, Virginia. The result of this mission is known as Harvest Christian Fellowship. Planting a church, while attempting to oversee spiritual sons in the United States and abroad, has been somewhat of a juggling act.

Using as a model my relationship with Dan Wolfe as a spiritual father, and with Sean and Matt as both natural and spiritual sons, I have attempted to structure Harvest Christian Fellowship as a spiritual family. Eventually, both Sean and Matt were ordained into the ministry. Since 1993, many have come and gone, but some have remained. For a season, Matt took on the responsibility of the local church to assist and support me in my endeavors to take this message to the nations. Over a year ago, Matt felt the call to move to Palm Coast, to assist in a church plant under the auspices of Church of the Nations. Sean and his family continue to lend their support to me at Harvest.

