

Resting Under the Cloud

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

P.O. BOX 18715

BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2002

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 7

BELIEVING WHAT WE CANNOT SEE

Chapter 2 13

WALKING IN DIVINE GUIDANCE

Chapter 3 19

A FAITH-CONTROLLED BELIEF SYSTEM

CONCLUSION 24

INTRODUCTION

These are days when “seeing is believing.” This is a standard most people are taught to live by, to avoid being fooled or taken advantage of. When it comes to spiritual matters, however, the Bible teaches us to believe first, without benefit of sight or feelings. Then, in due season, we will receive the promise (Hebrews 10:35-39). Sadly, few Christians have developed a capacity to walk by faith. As a result, few adventure into the places where God wants to take them.

Israel was led out of captivity in Egypt, and they began marching through the desert. God’s people were headed to His Promised Land. Through the pillar of a cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the Lord led Israel, protected them, and gave them light.

In this booklet, we discuss the importance of recognizing God’s presence, even when that presence is as a cloud, obscuring any form of evidence by sight that might be there. As we

learn to rest under God's cloud, we will find His perfect guidance for every moment.

Chapter One

BELIEVING WHAT WE
CANNOT SEE

“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

“He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people” (Exodus 13:21-22).

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:

“And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Exodus 14:19-20).

“Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the

cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go" (Nehemiah 9:19).

"Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

"And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

"And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys:

"But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.

"For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys" (Exodus 40:34-38).

There is so much said in the Word of God about this "cloud." God put a difference between Egypt and Israel, according to Exodus 11:7. Part of that difference was the cloud that separated them by day and the pillar of fire by night.

God has always had His way in leading His people, and in the desert He used a cloud. The cloud speaks of the presence of God. It also speaks of the Word of God, the faith we have in Jesus Christ, and the faith we take from the Word. We are to walk by faith and not by sight, according to 2 Corinthians 5:7. Therefore, we must have a pure faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith must be apart from the benefit of sight. Sometimes, a cloud may obstruct our view of the sun; and many times, the cloud of God deliberately obstructs our view of the Son of God. Yet, by faith, we follow Him.

When we follow divine guidance, we enter into faith-rest. Please remember that when the cloud was over the tent of the congregation, no flesh—not even Moses—could enter, for the presence of God filled it. But as long as His presence remained, there was rest in the camp.

God reduces every Christian's growth to the issue of faith. Sooner or later, we will come to a place of confrontation where we must choose to follow God *in spite of* what we see. To some degree, until we get to heaven, we will never understand some of the things we go through. But as we let God take us through, we learn to walk by faith.

Through Calvary, our lives are committed to God by faith. We were not present at Calvary, but we know that it happened two thousand years ago. We find the account in the Word of God that historically proves it. We were not there when Jesus Christ was upon the earth, but what a privilege Peter, James, and John had! They could literally walk by sight. The mystery about the disciples is that for three years they walked with Jesus while He was on the earth, yet many times, when the opportunities came, they did not exercise faith. Otherwise, Peter would have continued to walk on the water without sinking (Matthew 14:29-31), and Thomas would not have doubted Christ's resurrection.

Faith and Rewards

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

We have never seen Jesus in the flesh, and yet we believe. We did not see Him minister or hear Him preach. We did not witness the angry mob or hear the cries of evil against the Lord. We did not get a glimpse of the empty tomb, but still we believe it with all of our hearts. We were

not among the witnesses—more than five hundred all told—of Christ’s eleven post-resurrection appearances. We did not witness His ascension. That is why our way of life as born-again believers is so unique. We have to walk by faith or we will never believe.

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Ultimately, every one of our moments must be reduced to faith—a living faith, an abiding faith that produces a rest for our souls. As long as we have the cloud, we can walk by faith with the Word and the presence of God. This kind of walk glorifies Jesus and pleases Him tremendously. It blesses the Lord when, in the midst of the angelic conflict, He is able to point to our faith the way that He pointed to Job’s faith.

Through the first two chapters of Job, we are able to see what Job could not see when the trial of his faith came upon him. God told Satan, “Go ahead. You cannot take Job’s life, but you may do anything you want to him. I happen to know that he will respond in faith.” That kind of faith pleases God so much.

Many times as a pastor-teacher I have asked

God, "Why?" when I thought about certain people and the trials they were going through. And yet, I have always come out with peace, because the cloud of God's presence is over our lives.

Chapter Two

WALKING IN DIVINE GUIDANCE

“And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.

“Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

“And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:33-35).

There was the cloud that Israel saw by day. Then, at night, there was the pillar of fire, which really was a cloud of fire. In the night seasons, the Holy Spirit is revealed as a “spirit of burning” (Isaiah 4:4).

The cloud hovered over the tabernacle after Moses did everything according to God’s order and completed assembling it. The cloud hovered right over the door, the glory of God filled the

tabernacle, and Moses could not enter it! He could not see what was in the tabernacle at that time. He was reduced to faith.

We have the presence of God and a faith that comes through hearing the Word of God. Yet, if we have that, and then we start mixing in sight, circumstances, and feelings, it would be so easy for us to withdraw from a faith that serves by love (Galatians 5:6).

Scorched or Protected from the Heat?

“He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night” (Psalm 105:39).

The cloud of God became a covering for Israel against the scorching sun. And just as God covered them with a cloud, He wants us to use faith as our covering. Faith is a covering that protects us from the heat of the trials and the pressures that come against us. Faith-rest delivers us from the terrible pressure of trials that would indeed hurt us and paralyze us.

From time to time, people stop coming to church because they have been wounded. As long as they avoid the Cross, they appear to be getting along just fine. They may even say they love the message and the pastor. But, if their wounds are not taken care of quickly with the

unction of the Holy Spirit, a demon may infect them with a plague (see Mark 3:10).

What every one of us needs is to agree with God. Though He was perfect, He bore our shame and took all the pain of every man's sin upon Himself. Instead of being offended, He humbled Himself and died on the Cross, in our place.

When Calvary isn't allowed to crucify our wounds and expose them, they fester and hurt even more. The preaching of the Word is a two-edged sword—one side exposes and convicts, the other side heals. Those, however, who will not accept the healing process that comes through co-crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection often mislabel conviction as condemnation. We need to settle that issue with God and recognize that He is *for* us, and whatever He allows is for our sake.

The Cloud Leads the Way

Imagine, in Exodus and Numbers, what would have happened if Moses had refused to follow the cloud. The nation of Israel would have become just like the Egyptian army: overcome by the power of God and lost for eternity. There would have been no divine guidance, no

destination, and no divine purpose for their lives.

God put a cloud between Israel and Egypt. He would not allow the persecution of Egypt to come upon Israel because God set them apart and supernaturally protected His people (Exodus 15:26). Those who would refuse to follow the cloud would lose their covering, their protection, their guidance, and their sense of the presence of Almighty God.

Though the cloud protected Israel from the sun, the cloud also gave them light at night. Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." Our eyes cannot see Jesus Christ because we are reduced to faith. But our faith through the Word brings in light. It is so unique to think of a cloud that would bring in light and light up the night.

In 1893, surgeon Eleanor Chestnut was led by God to go into China. She used everything she had to build a simple hospital. With her own hands, she helped lay the bricks for the building during the day. At night, she performed surgery in her bathroom, which was the most sanitary room in the place she was staying.

One day, after amputating a laborer's in-

fected leg, someone noticed that Dr. Chestnut was limping. Several asked about the condition of her leg, but she wouldn't answer them. She had grafted skin from her own leg to patch the wound on the patient and enable him to live.

During the Boxer Rebellion, Dr. Chestnut—along with four missionaries—was killed by the terrible forces of evil revealed in men who stood against the good that God was trying to accomplish in China. Why, with all the great needs in China, did God allow this? John the Baptist was beheaded for simply proclaiming the truth, and that was God's plan for his life. Likewise, that was God's plan for Dr. Chestnut's life. Both went to be with God instantly. But the reason is God's, and in the midst of such things, we must walk by faith.

Overcoming Rationalization

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

Let us begin to recognize the depth of God's love and the way God moves to help us. It is crucial that we understand that the concept of divine guidance is a very deep and provoking

thought. I must walk by faith. Occasionally, this may seem unreasonable, but to walk by faith is the greatest way to walk. This seems irrational to the flesh, to the old sin nature, to sight and reason, to need and pain, to sorrow and separation, to divorce, to hospitalization, and to death.

In His silence, God whispers, "Trust in Me with all your heart. That is all I am after. Trust in Me. Don't lean on your own understanding. That is rationalization, which feeds empiricism. Like Thomas, you only want to believe what you can see with your eyes and touch with your hands. This is not pleasing to Me. You are walking before elect angels and before fallen angels. The one thing I desire is your total trust in everything that I say and do."

Chapter Three

A FAITH-CONTROLLED BELIEF SYSTEM

“And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him” (Numbers 7:89).

In the Holy of Holies, God spoke to Moses from above the Mercy Seat, from above the cloud of mercy. Let me show how vital it is for you not to condemn yourself when sight and circumstance seem to have a victory. There will be times when your belief system will seem weak. Sight will appear much stronger to your soul than what you really believe.

Sight, however, cannot endure. Faith does. Sight can never really win, but faith has won. When everything seems to be gone from you, simply enter into a deeper understanding of the

faith of Jesus Christ.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

“For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:16-20).

The Power of Trust

When I am not operating in the quality of godly faith that I desire, when my faith is not controlling my volition properly, when my faith is not controlling my emotions, I must instantly switch over and begin to derive the faith of Jesus Christ. This means I just trust Him, plain and

simple—without feelings, without evidence, and without sight. That is all it is. I trust *Him*.

For this reason, we purpose to hear the Word preached and to read again and again the promises of God, promises that never fail. We go over all these verses to strengthen our trust in these promises. No matter how many times we hear a preacher quote Hebrews 13:5 and say, “God will never, never, no never leave you nor forsake you,” it should mean something to us every time we hear it. We may have heard or read it a million times, but we need to believe it at that moment. Our belief system puts everything into action. Our belief system takes a message that could be dry and meaningless and turns it into something beautiful, something meaningful, something wonderful.

When I believe that God loves me, and I recognize that I am the object of His love, then my belief system causes me to experience an active, living faith in the fact that He does love me. Yes, many times I do feel it. Though feelings are never required, they should certainly respond to truth and to initiations from God. This is why the door of my heart must be open for the truth to control my emotions.

He Helps Our Unbelief

“And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

“And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.

“And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:20-24).

There are times when believing is very, very easy because the anointing of God is so heavy and sweet. But, honestly, there are other times when we have to say to God, “I believe, but help my unbelief.”

I refuse to confess my unbelief because I know its source—I don’t want that to have a place in my belief system as it becomes active.

Many times we have cried out for sight—for some tangible evidence that God is there, and

that He has a very definite plan for our lives. We may not do it consistently, but, of course, all of us have done it. In the reflections of our souls, we cry out because we don't sense the presence of God.

Perhaps, at that time, God seems to be hiding himself. When God does hide Himself from us, it is only because He desires that faith would become alive in us. God hides Himself for one reason: to give me an opportunity to please Him with my faith. With all that is coming against us, we can say, "I believe, I really do believe You, Lord. When the forces of hell come at me and I feel weak, I still believe You."

CONCLUSION

God blesses each of us according to our cries of faith. Faith cries out, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” And, God hears that cry. Furthermore, God answers that cry. There is never a time when God refuses to respond to the validity of a living faith.

Consider this: We have need of patience that we may receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36). There is never a need for faith after we believe. Our need is for faith to patiently trust Him more, to please Him in a greater way.

God is in the cloud. He is there all the time, waiting and watching our responses to His plan. His presence is constant and we must cling to the promises of His Word—promises that transcend sight and lead us into amazing victories, bringing joy and thanksgiving.