

Mansion of Prayer

A manuscript written by
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Chapter 1

Prologue

Falling in Love

A man came home to his empty apartment one evening. He saw the light blinking on the message machine. He pressed the play button and a beautiful voice said, “Hi, this is Julie.” Before hearing the rest of the message the man pressed the delete button thinking to himself “yah yah yah, I’ve heard all that before.”

Another man, in another part of town, in another time, came home to the same message on his answering machine. “Hi, this is Julie. I was just calling to let you know...” But before he heard the rest of the sentence he got distracted by the mail he had brought in from the mailbox just outside the door. The mail contained four or five bills and a Publisher’s Clearinghouse Sweepstakes packet.

A third man came home one evening and he, too, saw the light blinking on his message machine. He felt his heart jump at the thought that it might be Julie. He pressed the play button and her beautiful voice filled not only the room but also his heart. “Hi, this is Julie. I was just calling to let you know I love you and I’m looking forward to you coming over to my house.” The man played the message over and over again.

What does this parable mean? The message on the answering machine is the word of the Lord. You and I are one of the three apartment dwellers. When we are in love with our Creator, everything changes.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Not Just a Future Hope

Going to Grandma's house was an adventure. She had a rather small house but it always felt like a mansion to me. At the end of a two-hour drive, we would turn onto the country road that led to her house. Tall oaks lined both sides of the street and formed a green canopy that was both welcoming and enchanting. The car ride came to an end as we would pull into the gravel and grass parking spaces at the top of her lot. Everyone would have to carry something from the car down the grassy slope of her front yard. As we reached the concrete steps that marked the beginning of the 15 ft. sidewalk leading to her front door, we would brush the tiger lilies on the left. And to the right was a tall oak whose leaves had so blocked the sunlight that the grass had grown sparsely around its base. A thick green moss covered the base of the trunk. Grandma would be waiting at the door ready to give a hug to each one of us as we entered her home.

The house was more of a cabin, in that its original owner had built it as a summer place. When you entered you stepped right into the kitchen with a small eating area to the right. The table had two chairs on one side, a third chair at the end and the other two sides had window sill benches built right into the wall. The walls enclosed the kitchenette on three sides but the windows behind the bench seats opened up to view the oak tree just outside. The wall with no window had a large color photograph of two deer making their way through the woods. To the left of the picture was a cabinet door flush to the wall. It was almost within arm's reach as you stepped into the house and when you opened the cabinet, out would come an ironing board. This was the only hideaway ironing board I had ever seen. The cabinet provided a great place to hide summer treasures because my Grandmother never did ironing.

This past summer I had an opportunity to visit the Hearst Castle in central California. The place is a mansion by anyone's standards. It, too, began as a summer place. As a boy, Randolph Hearst would go camping with his parents on the site where the castle currently exists. He continued this tradition well into his adult years. Eventually he hired an architect to build a place for his family and friends so they would no longer be

required to stay in tents when visiting. The project grew to its present day size and is considered one of the most elaborate and expansive estates in North America. As I took a tour through the buildings, I wondered what it would have been like to be a Hearst grandchild and run through the rooms of this mansion. I am sure it would be very different than the tour I was a part of, where the group was restricted by velvet ropes, locked doors and courteous tour guides.

In John 14:2-3 Jesus says, “In my father’s house are many mansions... and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Jesus promises a mansion where we can be with him. All of my life I have been taught that this is the hope we have concerning heaven. There will be pearly gates, streets of gold, and mansions. Though this may be true, I believe there may be another meaning to this passage.

The word “mansion” is used only one other place in scripture. It happens to be in this same chapter. In verse 23 Jesus says, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My father will love him, and we will come to him and make our mansion (or our abode) with him.” It seems that our Creator is willing for us to enter a mansion with Him now, not just in the future.

What does this house look like? Does scripture give us any indication as to how we might enter that mansion? In Isaiah 56:7, the prophet Isaiah says that God’s house “will be called a house of prayer.” The Creator of the universe invites you into His home. It is certainly a mansion, with rooms just like any other home. You may first enter it simply as a guest, or you might possibly just stand at the front porch and peer through the door into the entryway. The Owner not only invites you in, but also wants you to become an adopted child, a *resident* of the mansion!

The mansion is a house of prayer where each room represents different images of prayer. There are different ways in which we receive the love of the Creator, and as we become more comfortable in the house of prayer, we are invited to explore new rooms. Adventures, surprises, warm fireplaces, hidden stairwells, and private porches await us as we explore the mansion He has prepared for us.

This little book is intended to be a tour guide through some of the rooms. However, there is no need to remain behind velvet chords, restrict yourself to the plastic

covered pathways, or even to stay with the tour group as you move through the house. You do not need to be a visitor. God invites you to be a resident... a family member. You have free reign of the house. Explore every nook and cranny. It is an adventure that need never end.

Chapter 3

The Entryway

I am not the Mailman

West Palm Beach is a wealthy community that sits on an island off the east shore of the state of Florida. The island is separated from the mainland by the intercoastal waterway that runs its length from north to south, and is the home of the Flaggler Museum, former residence of Richard Flaggler, an oil tycoon, who built this home for his third wife.

Flaggler made his money with his partner, John D. Rockefeller, in the development of Standard Oil Company. He was also instrumental in bringing the railroad to the central east coast of Florida. The railroad transformed this part of the state from a dangerous wilderness to a destination for vacationers, businesses and those who wanted to find their fortune and relocate their family to a new part of the country.

The wealth Flaggler had gained from Standard Oil allowed him to spare no expense in building his home. As you turn off of the main thoroughfare and head toward the mansion, you first notice the beautiful earlwood trees. These trees have a bark that is smooth to the touch; but what makes them particularly unique is the way in which their roots protrude from the trunk 3-4 feet above the ground and almost appear as legs extending into the earth. The trees look both ancient and strong.

Soon your attention is drawn toward the front of the Flaggler house and the huge white columns that adorn its front. When standing on the front porch, one feels dwarfed by the width and stature of the columns and left wondering about the architect and construction workers who helped to create such an edifice.

Stepping through the front doors is no less awe-inspiring. The entryway has expansive ceilings with a staircase made for movie scenes. It rises to the second floor, opposite the entryway doors. In each corner of the room are 10-foot coves with beautiful statues overlooking the activities of the room. As I gaze at the room, I envision that one could fit a full basketball court within the entryway and have enough ceiling height for

full-court passes. In fact, I thought if I were one of the Flaggler children I would have considered a basketball court as a far better use of this space than an entryway!

The mansion's wall tapestries are beautiful, the woodwork is handcrafted, and the artwork is from around the globe. It is a sight to behold. If I were speaking about John 14:2 in the way I have been raised all of my life, I would say that I should consider how much greater is the place that God is preparing for us in heaven. And though I am sure that is true, I believe that Jesus is telling us in this passage that God has prepared for us a place that we can enter now, a place called our mansion of prayer.

How do we get into the entryway of the home He has prepared for us? Many of us treat prayer as if we were the mailman. We bring our petitions and prayer requests as if they were a collection of letters and pieces of mail. We walk up to the front door of the Father's house, open up the mail slot and push the letters through, hoping that God might read them and, if he is so inclined, provide a response. We might drop off letters on a daily basis, but never enter into the house.

Sometimes when I hear public prayers, I feel like I am listening to demonstrators outside of a foreign embassy. The image is one you have seen on TV many times. The ambassador or some other official is locked up inside the embassy. Outside, the demonstrators are peering through the fence with their hands on the bars, chanting their demands. In the same way, I sometimes feel like people stand outside the gate yelling their requests to God, thinking that sometime He might come to a window and actually hear what they are repeating over and over again. God is not reluctant. He hasn't locked the gate or even the house. In fact, we have been told that we have been given the keys to the kingdom. He invites us in. However, the invitation is not like one given to a mailman to step inside while someone signs for a certified letter or a special package. It is also not to simply be a guest. God wants us to *move in*. He is inviting us to be a resident in the mansion that He has built for us.

Often a prayer request is the very thing that transports us to the mansion of prayer. Early in our spiritual journey, we often don't think about praying until our needs, pain, illness or tragedy forces us to see that we are incapable of personally handling every situation that comes our way. When we find that our own strength is insufficient, we ask God to give us more strength. This kind of petition may bring us into the entryway of the

house much like children on a scavenger hunt are invited inside to wait by the door while the needed item is retrieved from another part of the house. However, if my daughter was attending a neighbor's party and the kids went on a neighborhood scavenger hunt, she wouldn't just stop in the entryway when she came to her own home. She would enter our home and search wherever she wanted for the coveted object. She would move to the room that contained what she needed just the way the Father wants you to move through the mansion of prayer. The home is yours and He watches with great joy as you explore its riches from room to room.

Chapter 4

The Front Closet

Growth Takes Time

Once in awhile my wife and I look at new homes. We aren't particularly interested in moving from the home in which we currently live, we just like getting new ideas and seeing the unique things builders are incorporating into these new homes. We usually look at homes that are way beyond our price range. The amenities are wonderful and make me wonder who comes up with such great ideas.

On one such housing exploration, we went to a brand new development in a community not far from our own. This was a private, gated community that surrounded a well manicured, PGA-level golf course. The developers had invested an enormous amount of money in landscaping and the grounds were immaculately kept. The sales office for the development was actually a model home, so we took the tour. On this particular occasion our daughter came with us.

The home was English Tudor style, with a slate roof. The concrete treatment on the sidewalks made it appear to be made of cobblestones. The beautiful double-door entry opened into a hallway with portions of the wall recessed for pieces of artwork. The family room with its cathedral ceiling was to our left, and the kitchen, with its granite countertops, was straight ahead. The entryway contained a wrap-around staircase leading to the upstairs bedrooms.

Probably the most intriguing amenity of this home was something my daughter and I discovered as we stood in the entryway at the end of the tour. On the inside, flanking both sides of the double-door entry, were two closets. At first glance we couldn't see them because the woodwork of the closet doors blended in perfectly with all of the woodwork in the entryway. There were no door handles or hinges showing. However, it was obvious that there had to be closets in this area since there was no other place to hang the coats of either residents or guests. This was the perfect location for a closet, but we couldn't figure out how to open what we were certain had to be a closet door. Eventually, we asked the salesperson in charge of the model home and with a smile, she walked in front of us and

reached toward the panel. With a gentle push she released a hidden spring-loaded magnet that allowed the front closet door to pop open. The two of us spent the next ten minutes playing with this door, and my daughter took great joy in surprising her mom with the hidden closet.

My grandparents had a entry closet door that stands out in my memory. Upon opening the door you would find little marks with names and dates. To the untrained eye it might look like hieroglyphics, but all of us grandchildren knew it was the tablet on which our grand parents had recorded our growth over the past decade. Each Christmas, we would stand up against the closet door and have our new height marked. We would stretch as tall as we could and hope we had outgrown our cousins. The closet door became such an important piece of our family history that when our grandparents moved to a new home, we encouraged them to take the door with them.

At times I am plagued by self-doubt. I feel like I am struggling with the same issues over and over again. I see no evidence of change. My mentors continue to seem so much wiser than I. My goals continue to feel slightly out of reach. I wonder why God puts up with me.

At other times, a door that opens up inside the Mansion of Prayer surprises me. It is a door that gives me a glimpse into the progress that I have made. I might find that my understanding of God has changed, my capacity to receive grace has increased, and hopefully my capacity to offer grace to others has increased as well. The Master Builder has provided a secret closet where I can go to bemoan my slow progress while simultaneously being reminded of how far I have come.

When Grandpa measured me, I would be so excited with how much I had grown from the previous Christmas. So much so, that the next day, I would want him to measure me again to see if any progress had been made through the night. But he knew, as my Heavenly Father does, that growth takes time. And, sometimes, tremendous progress is measured in mere inches.

Chapter 5

The Closet Door

Failure and Growth

Spiritual growth is usually pretty unspectacular. By that I don't mean that God's work is anything short of amazing. I'm simply saying that spiritual transformation is sometimes about as dramatic as watching paint dry! The process is slow and the change seems imperceptible. The desire for the spectacular, and we all have it at one time or another, can lead us to conclusions that are false. When I see a highlight film of great moments in sports, there is no corresponding documentary of the endless hours of practice that went into making those moments possible. And even if there was, who would want to watch it? Most of us are mesmerized by dramatic conversion stories, intrigued by miraculous healings, and hopeful that the latest book might provide powerful transformation of our vocational or relational experiences.

I want victory but sometimes all I feel is defeat. I want the kind of spiritual power that will allow me to wave my hand and people will be slain in the Spirit. Instead, I wave my hand and people don't even wave back. I want the kind of spiritual insight that enables me to read scriptures and then be able to make profound statements about its meaning.

Instead, I read the scripture and sometimes fall asleep. I want to use my spiritual gifts to powerfully expand God's kingdom. However, I often find myself looking at other people's giftedness and wondering if heaven has a gift exchange department I could visit.

One of the most discouraging aspects of the spiritual journey is to feel like a failure in an area where you thought you had experienced significant growth. This comes in many forms, but the theme is usually the same. Often it is an area of disobedience that you have prayed about and have attempted to surrender to God. Or it may be a habit that you are attempting to break and have asked God's help in doing so. You have felt the issue is settled and attempt to move on only to find yourself wrestling with the same issue again; and, as a result, you feel incredibly defeated. The feelings of defeat and hopelessness increase as the cycle repeats itself. At these times, prayer feels like nothing more than an embarrassing request for God to forgive again and a vain repetition of previous promises.

One day, I was in the midst of one of these cycles. Asking for God's forgiveness again seemed presumptuous, and asking for His help felt pointless. I was discouraged, doubtful and pouting. I sat quiet before God and hoped that He would understand my childish behavior emanating from my very real feelings of shame, hurt, and some resentment that my journey wasn't easier. In fact, it didn't feel like a journey at all. I was visiting the same scenery over and over again. I wasn't going anywhere. The scripture writer said that I should be straining for the finish line in the race that has been set before me. However, I felt I couldn't get off the starting line because of too many false starts.

I wish I could say that in great wisdom, I sat quietly before God. However, a more accurate statement would be that I didn't have anything to say to God and couldn't think of any other place to go. So there we sat; God, my feelings and me. That threesome was a bit awkward since I wasn't sure if God would approve of my feelings. But, as it turns out, God is always more comfortable than I am with how I feel.

In the midst of my apparent stalemate, I became aware of the image of the hallway closet... or rather, the closet door. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, my grandparents had a special closet door on which the grandkids' heights were annually recorded.

I loved my grandparents and couldn't wait for the smell of my grandma's kisses and the scratches from my grandpa's five-o'clock shadow as he would pick me up and give me a hug. Immediately after the greetings, we had to engage in the important ritual of going to the hallway closet. Here, my sister and I would put our heels up against the inside of the door, stand as tall as we could, and let Grandpa mark our heights. He would put the date and our name next to the mark and then go on and on about how much we had grown. I always wanted to be taller. I wanted to grow faster than my cousins. I wanted to make my grandpa proud. I wanted to be proud.

In the same way, I so desperately want to be spiritually taller. My spiritual cousins all seem to be growing faster than I am. I look in the mirror and don't see any change. I'm hoping for a touchdown, a homerun, something spectacular. In fact, sometimes I would settle for *feeling* as if I have moved just two steps forward. I listen. God sees the growth. He knows. Asking forgiveness, again, is not presumptuous. Asking for His help is not fruitless. Change is taking place. Let the Father take you to the closet door and show you.

Chapter 6

The Living Room

Waiting

Prayer can sometimes be characterized as a search for answers. We prayerfully search the scriptures hoping to find some indication of God's direction. At other times we may plead with God to respond to our petitions with His intervention. So often it seems as if heaven is silent, as if our supplications drop impotently to the ground, that we cease to listen. We pray, but no longer wait for an answer. We hope for divine intervention, but have learned the skill of self-sufficiency.

In old movies and television shows, when a young man would arrive at a girl's home to pick her up for a date, inevitably she would not be ready. There were very awkward moments as the girl's father would invite him to wait in the parlor or living room. The boy is nervous and doesn't know what to say. The father may attempt to generate some small talk in order to get a feel for the boy's character, but ultimately, he knows that everything is relatively minor compared to the one for whom the boy is waiting.

The living room may be one of the most difficult places to dwell in the Mansion of Prayer. It is a room in which one waits. It may be less comfortable than the other rooms, at least at first. It is a room where one contemplates what is not known, a room of "unknowing." It is a room where knowledge does not reign supreme, where logic may not win the argument, and where reason is required to sit quietly and listen. The future is just out of reach, it is still being prepared and has not yet come down the stairs. The Father sits with us and teaches us patience. Sometimes the silence is excruciating, almost deafening. However, as we become more familiar with the ritual, the silence can become comforting, settling, calming and clarifying. Similar to taking three cleansing breathes to calm us when our emotions have been overwhelming, waiting in prayer can change our focus from our problems to His presence. The Psalmist says, "You [God] will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11b, NIV). The problem is that we are so often preoccupied with the eternal pleasures or gifts of God, that we miss the

joy of His presence. Waiting can prepare us for His presence.

There is so much that I don't know. Sometimes that lack of knowledge is painful. I may feel overwhelmed by financial pressure because the bills are far greater than the income and I have no solution. I may feel helpless in the face of injustice, and can't believe that my small voice could possibly have an affect on political change. I don't know why my friend is dying from cancer, why a close relationship has fallen apart, why my children are making certain choices, or how to cope with these overwhelming feelings.

I want a quick fix, a fast solution, a drive-up window, an express checkout lane. What I receive, however, is an invitation to sit in the living room. She is not quite ready. Just a little more preparation is necessary. With no apology and no intimidation, the Father's silence seems to say, "She is mine, and trust Me, she is worth the wait!"

Chapter 7

The Stairway

God Invites us to Intimacy

The musical, “Annie,” tells the story of a young orphan girl who has the opportunity to spend the holidays with a wealthy business tycoon by the name of Daddy Warbucks. Annie’s optimistic outlook and winsome spirit captures everyone’s heart (with the exception of the head mistress of the orphanage). Annie’s response to being selected by Daddy Warbucks was neither haughty nor flaunting. Instead, she responded with gratitude. When she was taken to the Warbucks’ estate and escorted into the mansion, she acted as if she had stepped onto sacred ground. She stood in awe of the abundance and extravagance of the place.

Various interpretations of this story have been portrayed in both theatre and film. In all of the versions I have seen, one of the outstanding features of the Warbucks’ house is the staircase. In one such film, the staircase fills the entire screen...wide enough for a cast of fifty maids and men servants to cascade down the stairwell in a dance routine.. The staircase broadens at the bottom with smooth marble banisters flanking each side. Twenty to thirty steps take the actors up to the first-level landing where the staircase splits in two as it wraps around both sides of the hall, proceeding to the second floor.

The stairs are inviting and welcoming, yet they are intended for residents only. Downstairs is where guests are entertained, while upstairs holds the private quarters for the residents of the home.

In the Flaggler home in West Palm Beach (see Introduction), William Flaggler had a secret stairwell hidden behind a bookcase in a room adjoining the dining area. His wife (this was his third) enjoyed entertaining guests with extravagant parties. She was much younger than he, and apparently had greater endurance for late-night entertaining. When William Flaggler’s energy was expended, or his tolerance for guests exhausted, he would excuse himself from the party and make his way to the room with the hidden staircase to enjoy a few minutes of quiet retreat in the private quarters of the house..

If you remain in prayer long enough, you will eventually sense the need or desire to go deeper into your prayer life. It's an invitation to become more intimate, to be more transparent, to be more vulnerable, to be bathed in His love.

From time to time, the way up the staircase to intimacy seems inexplicably blocked. It is as if the desire is there but no movement takes place. Prayer seems difficult,, rising no higher than the ceiling over your head.

I remember one lazy summer afternoon many years ago, my sister and I had been playing in the basement.. The time came for us to go upstairs and as we both moved toward the staircase, we realized how tired we were. We sat on the bottom stair and tried to talk each other into providing a piggy-back ride up the staircase. We felt like we were dragging ourselves through molasses. We had lost all our energy for moving up the stairs. In the same way, our prayers can sometimes feel as if they are dragging through molasses. I know of no antidote for this kind of experience, other than to acknowledge that it is happening and simply wait. The staircase can look enormous in the face of depleted energy.but, if you are patient, these periods of difficulty can be followed by some of the most intimate and personal experiences. These are the times when it seems as if the Maker of the Mansion carries you up the stairs Himself to places you have never been before.

There are times when our waiting needs to be in silence. No words need to be said. Sometimes no words can be said. At other times, no words should be said. The scripture speaks of two different forms of silence. One is where the person in silence is no longer listening. It is a silence of his or her own making by refusing to listen to what the Heavenly Father is saying . This silence pays no attention to the gentle promptings of the Spirit to change behavior, check attitudes, or confess wrong choices. This posture sees no need for cleansing (see The Mud Room). It is this silence that likely prompted the Psalmist to write, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Psalm 32:3).

The other silence involves attentive listening. It is an active waiting. The image might be that of a student with an open notebook and pen in hand, waiting for the professor to speak; or a researcher watching an experiment in progress, ready to record the results. Or, maybe a better image is that of an engaged person, silently but with great anticipation, going to the mailbox in the hopes of receiving a letter from his or her lover. This is the

attitude of silence about which Elihu speaks when he says to Job, “Pay attention Job, [and] be silent” (Job 33:31). Intimacy requires two-way communication. Some of the most powerful and intimate communication takes place with no words at all. Be silent and listen.

Chapter 8

The Kitchen

Somethin' Good is Cookin'

I asked a friend about his first memories of a home. He relayed the following.

“The first home I remember was a small place in Eufaula, Oklahoma. I don’t think it was any bigger than 800 square feet. Somehow we squeezed seven people into that little home. There was a front room, a kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom that Daddy had built on the back porch. We lived there until I was four years old.

“We then moved into a two story home that felt like a mansion. Downstairs, there was a front room, a kitchen and a master bedroom. Upstairs, was one large room... like a dormitory. The brothers were at one end of the room and the sisters were at the other.

“I remember the front porch and how we would sit there and watch everything and everyone go by. I remember the evenings when we would watch Gunsmoke, Beverly Hillbillies and Peyton Place. Life seemed pretty simple. I can visualize the members of my family in various rooms of that house. I can recall images of Daddy reading the newspaper in the front room or my brother upstairs playing games in the bedroom. When I think of Mama, I think of the many hours she spent in the kitchen. Sometimes, when we would sit on the front porch, we could hear kitchen noises through the front screen door. We looked at each other and smiled because Mama was in the kitchen. And, we knew that when Mama was in the kitchen, something good was happening.

“There are certain aromas that still take me back to my childhood and make me think of being in that house and knowing that something good was cooking in the kitchen. The smell of fried chicken or baked bread or corn on the cob would make my mouth water as I waited with anticipation for Mama to call us to the dinner table. I didn’t think about it much back then, but I now stand in awe at her ability to orchestrate those incredible meals for such a large family. The potatoes were ready at the exact same time that the meat came out of the oven. The drinks were poured right as we were being seated and the table was

set with plates, napkins and silverware. The dessert sat on a ledge waiting for us to clean our plates. She organized those of us who helped with precise instructions and perfect timing. She was like the conductor of an orchestra who knew every instrumental part and knew how to bring about a beautiful symphony from the various sounds of fifty instruments.”

Sometimes I think God is in the kitchen, and I know that when God is in the kitchen, something good is going to happen. Through prayer, a person can begin to sense when God is at work orchestrating something special. You must always remember that there is preparation before a feast. There is a great deal of work that leads up to a meal. Pots must be stirred, proper ingredients must be selected. Timing and temperature must be considered and fire or heat must be applied. All of these provide wonderful spiritual analogies.

Sometimes we see things being stirred up at work. It may be agitation or excitement, but often there is a heightened level of interaction that points to some kind of unrest. That’s a good time to ask if God might be in the kitchen. At other times it feels like the heat has been turned up. You might feel you are being forced to take sides in a conflict at work or you might be wondering if you will survive another organizational downsizing. You may be disagreeing with your spouse on parenting decisions or feeling pressure about confronting a good friend. The heat is turned up and it is uncomfortable. But is it possible that God is in the kitchen and He is orchestrating something good?

Sometimes I don’t understand the timing of certain circumstances, or why certain people have been brought into my life. I get frustrated when things don’t go according to my plans. I have things lined up in order, knowing that if they fall together, my goals can be accomplished. When my timetable is thrown off by circumstances that seem beyond my control, I would be wise to bend my knees, bow my head, enter into the Mansion of Prayer and journey back to the kitchen to see what God is putting together.

Feasting all of the time simply produces obesity. It seems we have become a nation of Christians who are spiritually obese. The availability of good spiritual books, preaching, TV shows and Bible studies has produced a consumer mentality. We look for the next great book to consume or the next great speaker who will give us new spiritual insights. There is nothing wrong with having these wonderful resources, but it is the Spirit

who prepares us for enlightenment. After having enjoyed a good meal, we need to push away from the table and engage in life. We need to take the spiritual truths we've learned and put them into practice. God orchestrates the circumstances around us to whet our appetite for the next meal He is preparing.

My mom would sometimes give me a little spoonful of what she was preparing long before the meal was to be served. In the same way, God will sometimes give us a taste, through prayer, of the good things He is preparing for us before we sit down at His banqueting table. When life seems to be getting a little complicated, go into your Mansion of Prayer and make your way to the kitchen. You may find God there preparing something especially for you.

Chapter 9

The Trophy Room

The Praise of Men or of God?

I want to be loved just like everybody else. I feel good when people are pleased with what I have said or done. Affirmation is not bad. It can bolster self-esteem, provide valuable feedback, strengthen the bond of friendship and encourage people to be their best. However, affirmation can be intoxicating and if it becomes a primary goal, it can lead to the surrender of principles and integrity.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, an author wrote that many are unwilling to live out what they believe because they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. I will guarantee that if you put your faith in the praise of people, you will be disappointed.

In 1997, a congressman from Oklahoma had the opportunity to provide the Republican response to the president's State of the Union address. The television audience was one of the largest to which he had ever spoken. He was articulate and persuasive in his delivery and felt good about his efforts. He believed he had represented himself and his political party well. Several people approached him after the speech and offered wonderful words of affirmation. Shortly thereafter, a man approached him and said, "I heard your speech and I want you to know I will start praying for you again." The remark sounds relatively innocent; however, the message behind the statement was clear. The person was incredibly disappointed in what had been said. His commitment to pray was actually a critical expression of displeasure with the congressman's speech. The interjection of the spiritual into the critique rendered the statement even more bitter. He wanted the congressman to know that his speech revealed a contradiction in principles and values that he once thought they held in common. Years later, as the congressman shared this story, he had obviously forgotten the many words of affirmation he received that day but could recall with clarity this man's disappointment.

When we are dependent upon the affirmation of others instead of the affirmation of God, we can be easily distracted from what we should be doing and give our attention only to what others want us to do. The right action is not always the most popular one. Speaking out for justice or morality is not always well received. But a commitment to living for God requires that we tune our lives to the melody and the rhythm of the creator and not be distracted by the music that others decide to play.

I have been in many offices and homes where trophies, plaques and honors are displayed. I was in an office recently where a wall was dedicated to the football career of the proprietor. In the same way, many of us display diplomas, certificates of achievement, honors and awards. They are trophies of accomplishment. Often they represent months or years of hard work and are a tangible indication of the approval of others. They are an adult version of hanging a child's A-paper on the refrigerator door.

Trophies are to be celebrated. Achievements should be cheered. Affirmation should be enjoyed. However, if your life's motivation is merely to receive more trophies, then you will always end up feeling empty when the applause has died down. You will feel envious of the people who have earned trophies bigger and better than your own. You will always be in competition, hoping that someone else will lose so you can win. However, when you seek after God's grace, you will find the grace to cheer others' successes. You will begin to find as much joy in giving affirmation as in receiving it. You will find strength in the face of adversity because your allegiance is to God, not to the applause of your peers.

Since our natural tendency is to seek out the praise of people, how can we reestablish our perspective so that God's smile guides our journey? It's possible that the Father has prepared a room for you in your Mansion of Prayer where He is willing to show you the trophies and awards you have received from Him. Enter into prayer and tell the Father you have been giving more attention to the praise of men than the praise of Him. He understands. And He loves you in spite of that tendency. Let Him invite you into the trophy room. Contemplate the things you have done or said that have brought great pleasure to the Father. You might see the image of the plaque that commemorates the time you volunteered in an after-school tutoring program. You might see, in the corner of your

room, a trophy that has the image of a towel and basin set atop a wooden base. The engraved plaque on the front might read “Outstanding effort in caring for your neighbor’s yard during the tragic illness of their parents.” Slowing down long enough to imagine what might be written on the plaques in the Trophy Room in the Mansion of Prayer can change your perspective on today’s activities.

I want to hear both the praise and the criticism of those whose journey intersects with mine. However, I want to be guided and motivated by that which pleases the Father. Taking some time to enter the Trophy Room can draw me closer to that end.

Chapter 10

The Library

We are God's Autobiography

If you are traveling East through Pasadena, California on Colorado Boulevard (a portion of the route of the annual Rose Bowl Parade), you will eventually come to Lake Avenue. Heading South on Lake Avenue will bring you into the town of San Marino, once the J. DeBarth Shorb estate. Henry Edwards Huntington purchased this estate at the beginning of the twentieth century. Henry Huntington began his career with the Central Pacific railroad, working for his uncle, Collis Huntington, one of its owners. When the older Huntington died, Henry moved to Los Angeles and greatly expanded the rail system in that urban area. Huntington's wealth grew not only out of his work with the railroads, but through his real estate development, power and water companies, and other business interests.

At the age of sixty, Henry Huntington discontinued his involvement in most of his businesses in order to spend more time on his book and art collections. Three years later, he married the widow of his uncle, also an avid art collector. The two of them accumulated one of the finest private collections of art and literature.

If you will continue traveling south on Lake Avenue, you will come to the entrance of the estate, which currently sits on over two hundred acres of beautifully landscaped botanical gardens. The gardens themselves are worth the visit. They include a desert garden, a Japanese garden, a rose garden, a tropical garden, and eleven other specialized gardens. One of the most intriguing is the bonsai tree collection. These miniature trees are living works of art. The mansion is now an art gallery and contains such wonderful pieces as Gainsborough's Blue Boy and one of the most familiar portraits of George Washington. Huntington's collection of rare books and manuscripts eventually became too large to be housed in one room of his residence, so in 1920, construction of a library building, which stands next to the mansion, was completed. It stands as a tribute to one man's passion for great literature. In it you will find a Guttenberg Bible, the Ellesmere manuscript of

Chaucer's Canterbury tales, and an incredible collection of the early editions of Shakespeare's works.

A library can be a magical place. Pull one book off the shelf and Hemmingway will transport you into the midst of one man's great struggle with the strength of a fish, the perils of the sea, and the clash of aspirations with the hard realities of life. Pull another book off the shelf and you can be drawn into the architectural world painted by Ayan Rand in "The Fountainhead," or caught up in a young boy's adventures in growing up in Pickwick's "A Prayer For Owen Meany." You can be taken to an island with "Robinson Caruso," to a distant planet in "A Space Odyssey," to the jungles of South America in Grisham's "The Testament," or take a bus tour of heaven in C.S. Lewis' the "Great Divorce." You can reach for the collection of the works of Martin Luther King and read his passionate letter from the Birmingham jail, or learn from the biographies of leaders such as Churchill, Lincoln, Mother Teresa, or Gandhi. The possibilities in the Library are endless.

If the mansion God has prepared for you contains a library, what books would be on the shelves? If you were to go there in a spirit of prayer, what would you read? Sometimes I need the refreshment of a good book. A book can give me a glimpse of a world bigger than my vocation. It can expose me to ideas I have never considered. I can debate with great thinkers or reflect with spiritual guides. Sometimes a book is simply a prayerful experience. When your eyes pour over a page and your heart simultaneously listens to the Spirit, you can receive insight that may not come in any other room in the Mansion of Prayer. Enlightenment might come while you are reading a children's book such as Eric Carle's "The Quiet Little Cricket," or while pouring over the rich prose of Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karpov." So many authors have tried to explain the plight of man's struggle, the richness of God's grace and the beauty of his creation... and the library is full of their efforts.

Someday you may need to go to the biography section of the library. As you glance through the volumes you might be surprised to find an authorized biography that has your name on it. You and God are co-authoring a book about your life. It is a work in progress, with chapters yet to be written. It contains a chapter on your family of origin, one about your childhood adventures, a painful chapter on surviving junior high, and a

hilarious chapter on your most embarrassing moments. Nothing has been left out, even the parts you suggested be left out. The chapters are worth reading through again, because they seem to have very different meanings years later than when you lived through the experience. It is as if each chapter continues to be a work in progress as reflection and experience provide fresh insight into the Author's great design. The book is unique in that you are the main character, but you also share in the creative process with the Author. He allows you to participate in the creative design of future chapters and miraculously weaves together His purposes. He takes characters and circumstances in earlier chapters that seem like a waste of time and unrelated to the plot, and subsequently uses them in surprising and powerful ways to show His power of efficiency and redemptive grace. As you mentally turn toward the end of the manuscript, consider what might be the title of the chapter that is currently being written. He writes about you with passion and love. Let your time with the Author give you a sense of the care with which He has developed your character.

Before we leave the library, we should take notice of the most important book in this room. It holds center stage. It is the centerpiece around which all other works emanate. It is that which was from the beginning, and through which all things were created. That Word finds its expression through the Holy Scriptures.

The Scriptures are useful for instruction, for discipline, as an authority for moral living and as a revelation of God's design. The Scriptures can also be read as a wonderful piece of literature. It is a collection of history, poetry, romance, biography, drama, and proverbs. There are adventures that span generations, wars between nations, letters between lovers, and visions of the future. It is historical yet timeless.

Quiet moments in a library are sometimes best spent by thinking about those words from scripture that spontaneously come to mind while contemplating your journey. God has promised that His word will be written on our hearts and our minds. What we have previously read will often come back to mind with amazing timing. It is as if the words of Scripture become our own words; where the words of an inspired author become the words of our prayers. Quite possibly in the midst of great loneliness, the words of David might become our own.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? I cry out by day but you

do not answer; by night and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the praise of Israel. . . I will put my trust in You” (Psalm 22, NIV).

Or when feeling God’s gentle prodding you might voice the words, “The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack for nothing. He leads me beside quiet waters and He restores my soul...” (Psalm 23). Or your mind might very naturally go to the beginning of that most familiar prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” And then your spirit joins throughout the remainder of the prayer, contemplating each line as if it were the first time you had offered up these words. An inspired word in these moments of reflection can bring peace, set a new direction, provide a new perspective, and mold your character. If we will look at the footnotes in the biography of our lives, we may find many references to the scriptures and discover the profound influence God’s Word has had on our lives. May your time spent in the library convince you that the Author who is writing your biography, is actually writing an autobiography. The character He is creating in you is stamped with His own image.

Chapter 11

The Mudroom

Cleansing begins with confession

Many homes, regardless of their size, have a mudroom. The room often has an entrance from the back or side yard. In larger homes this room might contain a sink and a shower. In our home the laundry room served as the mudroom.

In the northern states the mudroom is the place where the snowy boots and the winter coats get left so that water doesn't get tracked throughout the house. There is a special place for the mittens to dry so that they will be ready for the next outdoor adventure that was being planned before the first one had even ended. In the western states the mudroom is the place where the cowboy boots and denim jackets get left after morning chores. For moms everywhere, the mudroom is a place where the kids (and husband) leave behind those things that have accumulated; all the dirt and grime from play or work. Sometimes it is followed by a trip to the shower to wash away the residue that made its way past the clothing and attached itself to every crease of skin in the child's neck, elbow, ears and feet.

I don't know if onion burgers originated in the state of Oklahoma. I do know that we have more than our share of restaurants that specialize in onion burgers. We may not have the best in the country, but I have yet to find any better. A few years ago I decided to go to a local spot for lunch. The place is called Bunnies Onion Burgers. It is a stand alone building painted red and white, with a seating capacity of about thirty-five. The building looks similar to the original McDonalds hamburger stands without the golden arches. During a busy lunch you will stand at the door and wait for a table to open up. The person behind the counter will bark out orders as to where the customers are to sit, and then turn around and continue to work at the grill. This particular afternoon I chose to sit at one of the seven stools at the counter. The counter surrounded the grill on which were cooking ten hamburger patties, ten buns and a mound of browned onions. The smell was pungent, but sweet. I put in my order, watched it being cooked, and then consumed it with great

satisfaction. Within thirty minutes I was heading back to finish the days work at the office. At about six in the evening I arrived home. I parked the car in the garage and came into the house through the laundry room (which serves as our mud room). The laundry room opens into the family room, and at the far end of the family room is the kitchen. My wife was working at the kitchen sink preparing something for later that evening. I hadn't gotten three steps into the family room before my wife said, with a very accusing tone, "Where have you been?" I asked her what she was talking about. She said, "That smell! Did you just come from an onion burger place?"

I had been caught. The smell from the lunch grill had so permeated my clothing that my wife noticed it as soon as I walked in the door. She ordered me to march back out to the garage, take off all my clothes and go straight to the shower. I remember thinking in the shower how I hadn't even noticed the grill smell on me. I wondered how many people I had come into contact with that afternoon who noticed the same thing my wife did, but said nothing.

One of the entrances into the Mansion of prayer is through the mudroom. This is the place where we leave those things that have clung to us and make us less than our best. Here we remove the mud and grime, slush and dirt, and begin the process of getting "cleaned up."

When we come into the Mansion of prayer through this entrance we may hear God ask, "Where have you been?" This is the same question He asked Adam and Eve after they had been disobedient. This is not a question that stems from God's ignorance of our whereabouts. Rather, He provides for us an opportunity to confess, and confession is the beginning of cleansing.

The mudroom can be the place where forgiveness is sought. It can also be the place where insight is sought. The mud from our day that has clung to our boots might include such things as off-color jokes, foul language, slanderous remarks, divisiveness at the workplace, or pent up anger from frustrating relationships. We are not told to separate ourselves from the world in which we live. Quite the contrary. We are to be change agents and be an influence for making the world a better place. However, in the process of influencing, we become influenced. In the process of trying to change things for the better we are affected by the places, the people and the experiences we have. Some of the ways

in which we have been influenced need to be cleansed, and it is often the subtlest influences that can be the most destructive. These are the ones where God needs to provide insight so that we are not just cleansed on the surface, but we are washed from the inside out. I don't know what subtle messages you have received, but I know some of the ones that have strongly influenced my journey. Some TV commercials tell me that my success is based on the car I drive, the TV I own or the watch I wear. There are many books that tell me that the best way to measure my success is by the income I earn. Old "tapes" from my childhood years keep me stuck in unproductive patterns of living. The nightly news tells me that the world is a frightening place, and that virtually no one can be trusted. Business newsletters tell me that I can control my own destiny. Fashion magazines tell my daughters how to dress, and define the acceptable body image. My western culture tells me that all the worlds' problems can be solved with more money. I need to be willing to take off these dirty garments and leave them in the mudroom. And I need insight as to what other ideas and thoughts have clung to my heart and mind, and keep me from being all that God intended me to be. I need to be bathed in the water of God's forgiveness and cleansed by a love that cares for me completely and unconditionally. I need to be bathed by a grace that gives me a fresh start and reinvigorates my spirit. I need to be cleansed by a gentle compassion that takes my mixed up notions of success, priorities and self-image, and washes them down the drain. The warm water of his Spirit replaces the stench that I have accumulated with the fresh aroma of His presence. The mudroom can be a place where the cleansing process begins, and God's question of, "Where have you been?" can be the beginning of allowing His image to be formed in you.

Chapter 12

The Hallway

Enjoy the Journey

Most of us have experienced that golden moment in the car when one of the children in the back seat speaks up and says “are we there yet?” The question usually comes about an hour into the journey with four hours yet to go. The question usually marks the beginning of the impossible task of keeping the children occupied while the miles slowly click off on the odometer.

At the start of a 500-mile trip, many men have the fantasy that the entire journey can be made on one tank of gas and only one brief 10-minute pit stop. The calculations have already been made that if the family can average 70 miles an hour, the trip will only take 7 hours and 20 minutes (including the 10 minute pit stop). You might even hear him say that if we get out of town by 6:30 a.m. we can make it there before 2:00. Furthermore, if we pack enough snacks we can eat lunch after we get there. Most fathers and husbands share these secret fantasies, though they are rarely shared with other family members. As the years pass our aspirations become more realistic and our goals more reasonable. Eventually we simply hope to get out of town by 2:00 p.m. and hint that it would be nice if the journey didn’t take more than 2 days.

Many family journeys have taken my crew through the city of St. Louis. We have seen the huge arch that is a city landmark and is described as the Gateway to the West. We have driven past the Cardinals baseball stadium, crossed over the Mississippi River, driven by the many factories, and enjoyed the rolling hills in which are nestled the many residents of that great town. St. Louis was never a city in which we stopped (unless it happened to be the designated pit stop). It was always a city through which we passed as we traveled to our destination. A few years ago I had a speaking engagement in St. Louis. St. Louis became my destination. I had a free afternoon and had seen some billboards advertising the St. Louis Botanical Gardens. A pastor’s wife had told me the evening before that they

were beautiful and well worth a visit. Her husband offered no opinion because, even though he had lived in the St. Louis area most of his life, he had never gone to the gardens.

I had often seen the signs for the gardens during my travels through the town. It never occurred to me to stop because I was on my way to a destination. This particular afternoon I had an opportunity to see what I had been missing on every one of my previous trips.

Just a half a mile off of the highway, nestled among the trees in a southwest corner of the town, is a world of beauty for anyone willing to stop and take the time to enjoy. Acres and acres of land have been dedicated to recreating gardens representative of areas around the world. There are rose gardens and iris gardens, Japanese gardens and European gardens, tropical gardens and garden mazes. It is one of the most peaceful and beautiful places in the Midwest. As I walked through the gardens that afternoon I realized how much I had missed. I had passed this place numerous times and never stopped because it was not my destination.

A year later my family and I were traveling north to visit friends. When we came to St. Louis I told them that we had to stop because I wanted them to see the Botanical Gardens. It was not our ultimate destination but I had learned how important it was to enjoy the journey.

This chapter is not about the gardens behind the Mansion of prayer. There are wonderful discoveries to be found in that place, but that is not the destination for this chapter. Instead, I want you to consider the hallway in the mansion. A hallway is usually viewed as simply the pathway or passage that gets you to where you want to go. No one gives much thought to the hallway because you are on your way to some other place. It is the pathway to the destination, not the destination itself. However, most of life happens on the way to someplace else. On the way to getting an education we might meet our future spouse. On the way to building a career our values are established. On the way to building the home of our dreams, our children grow up and leave.

How would life change if the journey became as important as the destination? A characteristic of the ministry of Jesus is that he valued the journey as well as the destination. Much of his ministry took place “on the way.” He was on his way to Galilee when he met the woman at the well. He was on his way to a time of prayer when he saw the crowds and had compassion on them. He was on his way to a time of rest when he calmed the storm for the disciples. The pathway to the destination can provide more opportunities for growth, for ministry and for learning than the destination itself.

One time, in prayer, I felt as if God was drawing me toward the hallway. I didn't feel compelled to pass through the hallway, but rather to stop and reflect. The hallway was my destination.

Chapter 13

Pictures on the Wall

Into the Future Backwards

When I think of hallways, the image that dominates my mind is the image of my grandparent's hallway. You can probably guess what was on the hallway walls. The walls were covered in pictures. There were pictures of my grandparents, pictures of my dad and his childhood dog, pictures of my mom and other family members. I was very proud that a picture of me had made the wall.

Each picture represented a snapshot in time. The snapshot symbolizes a memory, but it also is a way by which to connect my future with my history.

Sometimes the road to my future destination gets cluttered with roadblocks and barriers. I might get frustrated by the amount of time that it is taking to accomplish my goals, perturbed that people are getting in my way, or anxious that I had not planned on unforeseen delays. Sometimes I get stuck in my circumstances and don't see any way around my problems. The dominance of my ultimate goal has blinded me from the opportunities inherent in my present problems.

There is an old Hebrew proverb that says, "We walk into our future backwards." We don't know what the future holds, but we do know the past and the present. The Hebrew people had confidence that if God had taken care of them in the past, He would certainly be faithful to provide for them in the future. The value of telling, and retelling the great stories of God's past provisions is that they provide reassurance of God's ability to help His children navigate the difficult circumstances they face today and tomorrow.

There are phrases that can stop me dead in my tracks: phrases like “It’s cancer,” or “I think you better come now,” or “There’s been an explosion.” In prayer I need to allow the Spirit to take me to the hallway. I need to take a look on the wall. The Father has taken snapshots of my journey and I need to make a connection between my questions of the future and the provisions of the past.

My wife and I went through most of the first decade of our marriage believing that we probably would not have children. This was not our choice, but our conclusion based on the comments of physicians with whom we had consulted. In the eleventh year of our marriage Kay became pregnant. It was pure joy when we heard the news. Within six hours we were in a hospital room having a sonogram. We received a small picture of our little girl. The image was barely discernable, but I wanted everyone to see it. Scripture says that God has known you from the beginning and knit you together in your mother’s womb. I am guessing the heavenly Father has a sonogram picture of you that hangs on the hallway wall in the Mansion of prayer.

There are other pictures as well. They are spiritual pictures God has chosen to commemorate the history of your relationship and celebrate His joy over you. The Lord may need to show the picture of how He brought you through a particular illness 10 years ago or provided financially when you thought there would be no food on the table, or helped you reach a previous destination or goal when the odds were not in your favor. He will remind you of how He has been on the journey with you. Sometimes we become so preoccupied with the destination that we fail to enjoy the journey with the Father. It’s time to stop and smell the roses. It’s time to get off the highway and walk in the Botanical Gardens. It’s time to stop in the hallway and look at the collage of pictures that the Father has taken of your journey and allow your confidence to rest in His provisions not your own resources.

Chapter 14

The Conservatory

The key that opens the side door

In ninth grade I sang in my high school choir. Our choir director challenged us with some pretty difficult pieces and took us to state competition. Late one fall he informed us that we would be singing at an afternoon tea at a person's home in the community. This was a very wealthy person and the home was in an exclusive part of the village. I wasn't certain why we were singing there, but I assumed that our director hoped for a nice donation to help with our expenses to the state competition. Whatever the reason, any excuse to get out of school for a few hours was a welcome opportunity.

At the appropriate time of day we met at the choir room and organized ourselves into three groups for transportation to our mini concert. Having never been to the house I couldn't understand how all of us could fit into any room in a person's home. The weather was too cold for an outside tea so I assumed that the event would be held in multiple rooms of the house. If it was anything like my home, the tenors could squeeze into the kitchen, the basses could line up in the hallway, the altos could congregate in the dining area and the sopranos might fit in the living room. The problem was there would be no room left for those who had been invited for the tea.

When we pulled up to the house I realized that the comparison with my home was like comparing a Piper Cub airplane with a 747. The cobblestone driveway and horse stables were an indication that I was in a neighborhood unlike any neighborhood I had been in before. We climbed out of our vehicles and filed quietly into the house. We went through two rooms, and then through a set of double doors into a room two stories high called the conservatory.

The room had a dark wood floor and a cathedral ceiling. There was a thin balcony along two sides of the room that was used to explore the books that filled the shelves on the upper half of the room. At the one end, near the double doors, was a nice seating area

on throw rugs and here is where the tea and finger foods were arranged for the invited guests. At the other end were rows of chairs for the guests to listen to our concert. In front of the chairs were a beautiful black piano and enough room for our choir to stand three rows deep. Behind us was a beautiful lead glass picture window overlooking the wooded grounds behind the home. I don't know if it was the acoustics of the room, or the inspiration of the setting, but we did a great job.

The conservatory is the room where music fills the air. It is a place where melodies are sung and instruments put forth their rhythm and harmony. It is a place of practice and performance. It is a place where you can sing at the top of your lungs or whisper a quiet tune.

The Mansion of prayer has a conservatory. It is a place where you can get in touch with the rhythm of your life. It is a place to listen to the music of God's creation. It is a place to listen to the song that God sings about you.

I am convinced that this room has an entrance into the backyard. It is actually an entryway into the house that is used by those who are familiar with the home. It is not the way by which first time visitors typically come. It is the entrance of music. Scripture says that God inhabits the praises of his people. When we sing praises we enter into the Mansion of prayer through the side door of the conservatory. For many this becomes the most frequently used door of the house. It is the entrance many of us use in our worship services. The style of music is somewhat irrelevant as long as it speaks to your heart and comes from your heart. You may love a jazz ballad by Aretha Franklin or prefer Tchaikovsky suite in D-minor. You may love to sing and have the voice of an angel, or be reluctant to sing in front of a crowd because you sing monotone. The Father sits in the conservatory with you and listens, and smiles, and is so glad that you have decided to join Him in the sweet music of life. Enter into the Mansion of prayer with music on your lips. It is the key that opens the side door.

Chapter 15

The Bedroom

The Physician prescribes rest

On the western edge of Colorado Springs is a National Park called the Garden of the Gods. The beautiful rock formations that protrude abruptly out of the ground and dwarf everything beside it form a welcoming gateway to that portion of the Rocky Mountains. The rock formations are both grand and inspiring. They are a wonder of nature and a testament to God's creative handiwork.

Just north of this landmark sets the headquarters of the Navigators organization. This is an institution with a longstanding commitment to Christian discipleship, and to the publication of literature to support that discipleship. The entrance to the property is very nondescript, and could be easily missed by someone traveling the two-lane road that passes in front of the property. However, those who make an effort to visit this spot are well rewarded. The drive onto the property immediately splits, with the drive to the right taking the visitor to the business building, which handles all of the publication and organizational offices for the Navigators. However, the real treasures are to be found on the pathway to the left. This drive takes the visitor on a winding path back into a small valley nestled in the foothills of this eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. This property was deeded to the Navigators back in the 1940s from the estate of Richard Whitland.

The valley contains the same type of rock formations found in the Garden of the Gods. The views are every bit as spectacular, and in some ways, even more so because of the backdrop of the hillsides. Up the side of one face of a cliff you can catch a glimpse of an eagle's nest, and, if the season is right, further down on a grassy hillside you might see several mountain sheep grazing in the warm sunshine. The beautiful horns curled around the side of their skull are an inspiring sight. A lucky traveler might see off in the distance mountain goats whose light brown coat blends into the mountain colors. They often go unnoticed until something startles them. Then, as they move together, it appears as if the entire hillside is moving. Deer are frequently sighted in the valley, and are probably considered residents more than they are considered guests.

Nestled into the hillside that lies to the south of the property is the castle, built in the 1920s. The fieldstone bridge that spans the mountain creek in front of the castle makes this scene look like a drawing out of a European book of fairy tales.

The Navigators have converted the castle into a breathtaking retreat center. The conversion retained the ambiance of the castle, preserved the design of most of the rooms and retained many of the furniture pieces and amenities of the time when it was used as a residence.

I had an opportunity to spend two nights in one of the castle bedrooms. When I stepped inside the room all I could do was stare. I felt as if I had stepped into the pages of a European Home & Garden magazine. Straight ahead, hanging in the center of the room was a beautiful chandelier with crystal beads and brass fittings. To the right was a fireplace bordered with marble tiles and topped with a beautiful mantle. On either side of the fireplace were sconces that lit up that area of the room, and were probably originally used as oil lamps. On the far side of the room was a beautiful bay window, with an inset-padded bench that was ideal for reading. The windows surrounding this bay seat were leaded glass and opened onto the courtyard below. The centerpiece of the courtyard was a fountain with the gentle sound of water trickling over the edges from level to level. Off to the left of the courtyard was the grassy valley with a backdrop of beautiful rock formations and the Rocky Mountain foothills. Next to the bay window was a small table with two Victorian chairs. To the left of the doorway was a large four-post bed with mattresses so thick that you needed to climb on to the bed. The bed was draped with a beautiful comforter and six pillows. Everything about the room said, "Come in and rest."

Often God's invitation to intimacy begins with an invitation to rest. Some of us find that very difficult to do. Our busy agenda, long "to-do" lists, and frantic schedules conspire to keep us from finding the necessary time to rest. Our lives are very cluttered. Once it was hoped that technology would help us be more efficient so that we could have more time to use in other endeavors. It seems that instead technology has simply created more time to fill with other technology. We can now communicate via cell phone, e-mail, palm pilot and videophone. We can see broadcasts of a movie via cable, satellite dish, direct link, or DSL. We have picture-in-picture TVs, twenty-four hour news and a plethora of movie stations.

Most of us don't fill our lives with bad things. We have work schedules, school schedules, kid's athletic team practice schedules, church activities and exercise routines. We squeeze in vacations, graduation ceremonies, house repairs and social gatherings. Some of us try to make church activities a high priority, but in the process, simply create a religious clutter that doesn't look much different than non-religious clutter.

The Psalmist says that the Good Shepherd "makes me to lie down in green pastures, leads me beside quiet waters and restores my soul." The call to prayer is a call to challenge the clutter in your life. The invitation to intimacy requires a pause in the mad rush of life. The Mansion of prayer is a dwelling place, not a pit stop. It is a place for building relationship, not an activity to be checked off of a "To Do" list.

I once had a young man working in my office as an intern. His ultimate aspiration was to be a physician, and just this past year he graduated from medical school. He worked in my office just after his graduation from college. I thought he would make a great physician, but I knew if he was going to make a great husband and father he was going to need to find balance in his life. He was skilled and talented and very task oriented. During one of our afternoon meetings he asked what his assignment would be that afternoon. I told him that his task was to walk around the neighborhood for thirty minutes and quietly listen. He looked at me a little puzzled but followed my direction. I didn't realize how difficult the assignment would be. Upon his return he met with me again and informed me that it had been a total waste of time. He reminded me that we had several projects that needed to be completed and some deadlines that were coming up. I reminded him that the projects were my responsibility and that so was he, and he needed to be prepared to do a similar assignment the next afternoon. The demands of the urgent shout for our attention while the issue of importance often get placed on a shelf. Prayer allows us to reconnect with issues of importance. Praying "on the run" is not inappropriate, just like leaving a message on an answering machine is not inappropriate. However, a message on a machine can never replace a visit to the house.

I have a friend who once told me of her experience in attending a silent retreat. She had aside two days and two nights to go to a Catholic retreat center and spend the weekend in silence. She had never done this before and was very excited about the experience that was before her. When she arrived at the retreat center, along with several other guests, she

was greeted by one of the sisters who gave oversight to the center. My friend received a personal tour of the grounds and buildings. The sister showed her where meals would be served, and informed her of when evening services would be held. She was then escorted to her room, which was a sparsely appointed, but very adequate room with a bed, small desk and chair. In closing the sister suggested that if my friend got tired that afternoon she should feel free to sleep. My friend was taken back by this comment. She hadn't come here to sleep. She had come here for a silent retreat and she was determined to be the best "silent retreat" this retreat center had ever seen. She thanked the sister for the comments and the tour, but informed her that she had no intention of sleeping that afternoon. She noticed the sister's odd smirk as she graciously nodded her head and backed out of the room.

She began her retreat in the room with a good book and a few minutes of prayer. Within a very brief period of time she noticed her eyes getting very heavy. She hadn't realized how exhausted she was from the week's activities. She couldn't keep her eyes focused on the pages. Before long she moved over to the bed and slept the afternoon away.

I have many who have told me how frustrating it is when they start to fall asleep right in the middle of prayer time. Some have gone so far as to say that it is Satan trying to keep them from praying. I guess that is a possibility, but I tend to think that it is probably just God's invitation to rest. Sometimes sleep is exactly what we need. The rhythm of life includes rest. God has woven it into the fabric of the universe. Prayerful living is Sabbath living; taking time to rest. Moving into the bedroom in the Mansion of prayer may simply mean that it is time to take a nap and allow God to restore your body and your soul.

Chapter 16

The Gymnasium

The mundane never goes unnoticed

At the end of my sixth grade year I was invited over to a friend's house for a pool party. I lived in a small suburb of the city and was bussed to another community for school. This school sat in the middle of a very wealthy community, but served two other suburbs, including the one in which I lived. My friend, Jeff, lived on the same road the school was on, though I had never been to his home prior to this invitation.

My mom took me to Jeff's house. I knew we were in a nice neighborhood because you couldn't see the homes from the road. As we turned on to the beautiful wooded lot of Jeff's home I noticed a barn up ahead on the right. The barn was set in the trees and was in nice shape. Just past the barn was a pond. It wrapped around the East side of the property. Eventually the blacktop driveway formed a circle in front of the home. Inside the circle was a goldfish pond in the shape of an "S" (the first letter of the former owner of the home). My mom dropped me off and I ran around to the back where some of the others were already playing. The large pool had six fountains shooting out from the side. To the left was the guesthouse. I was familiar with guest homes, but I had never seen a guesthouse before. The patio doors of the guesthouse opened onto the patio, which was connected to the concrete and stone border of the pool. Bordering the other side of the pool was the back of the main house, a two-story home with thick dark-wood beams and lots of windows.

After playing in the pool for an hour we were ready for a snack. We dried ourselves off and followed Jeff into the kitchen where the cook was preparing food for the family. Jeff did what any all-American boy would do; he went over to the commercial-sized refrigerator, opened the door, pulled out a package of bologna and distributed slices to each one of us. It hit the spot. We then made our way back up the long driveway to the barn. I was told we were going to spend some time jumping on the trampoline that was housed inside the barn. Jeff was the only person I knew who had a trampoline. I was pretty excited. When we entered the barn I noticed the lawn equipment in one half of the barn, and sure enough, the trampoline sat in the other half. I jumped for several minutes

and then noticed a wooden ladder built into the wall of the barn, right next to the trampoline. It led up to the second floor of the barn. I asked if I could climb up and Jeff said, "Sure." When I got to the top I was speechless. The second floor of the barn contained a full-court, wood-floor basketball court. I had found my new home. The barn was where I wanted to live the rest of my life.

The next year I went out for my seventh-grade basketball team, but didn't make the final cut. Several of us put together an intramural team and played in the Saturday intramural league. The games were played in the gym that was shared by the senior high and junior high schools. When the bleachers were pushed back, two full court games could be played at once. In the area above the bleachers on both sides were tumbling mats and equipment that the P.E. teachers would use to teach their classes. When both courts were in use the only place for spectators to view the games was from the landing area atop these bleachers.

I enjoyed playing basketball so the intramural team was fun, but I knew that it wasn't quite as important as the official seventh-grade team. We did not talk much about the intramural team at home. However, I never will forget one of the games. During one of the timeouts I glanced up to the railing that guarded the second-floor landing above the bleachers. There stood my dad. He had a big smile on his face and raised a fist of encouragement and approval for something I had just done. My dad traveled a lot, and I hadn't expected him to show up for my games. Apparently he had made a special effort to be there and I couldn't have felt better if a talent scout had come to recruit me for college.

That image reminds me of Acts, chapter six and seven, where we are told the story of Stephen. He was a man full of grace and power who was asked to wait on tables. He earned the respect of others by the way he went about his tasks and presented his faith. He angered those who wanted to refute his views, but they could find no fault with his arguments. They became even more infuriated when he responded with grace. The scripture says that all who saw him thought he had the face of an angel. Eventually they resorted to violence and stoned him. But, before his death he looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. Scripture often refers to Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father. I wonder if this is an image of Jesus looking over the railing of heaven and catching Stephen's eye. Stephen did the ordinary things extraordinarily well.

He responded to the opposition he faced with grace. Jesus catches his eye from heaven and smiles and gives a gesture of affirmation as He looks over the rail of heaven.

A gymnasium can be a place where “performance” takes place, but more often it is a place of exercise, preparation, routine, and repetitious activity. Your Mansion of prayer may contain a gymnasium. It may be a place where you reflect on the ordinary, the mundane, the repetitious, or the otherwise uneventful aspects of life. Those things don’t go unnoticed to God. If you will take time in prayer to think about the ordinary things of life, and ask God’s help to do those things with grace and integrity and consistency, you may find some extraordinary opportunities. And, maybe you will catch a glimpse of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father giving you an ovation of encouragement and approval.

Chapter 17

The Portico

Getting the big picture

The Pacific Coast Highway (also known as Highway 1) runs north and south along the coast of California. Traveling north past Cambria you come to an area known as San Simeon. The area is just south of the Los Padres National Forest. San Simeon may be best known as the location of The Hearst Castle. You can see the castle set on the mountainside long before you reach the drive that takes you up to its location. The drive winds up the mountainside with numerous switchbacks to help make the incline more manageable. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up, nestled among some trees, are numerous outdoor wild animal pens that once held one of the largest private collections of exotic animals. A little further up the hillside is a mile long arbor that was constructed so that those who wanted to ride horses could do so in the shade. Approaching the residence you pass the indoor pool, the tennis courts and then reach the staircase that comes up beside the beautiful Romanesque outdoor pool.

If you are on a tour of the castle, the tour guide will describe the grounds and the location where Randolph Hearst camped as a boy with his parents. As he grew older he continued to come to this place and would bring along family and friends. Eventually he hired an architect out of San Francisco and commissioned her to build a place so that his family and friends would no longer have to camp on the mountain, but would have a permanent structure in which to enjoy the beautiful mountain views.

The tour guide may usher you in to a side entrance with a concrete circular staircase that takes you into the second floor wing of guest bedrooms and sitting rooms. One such sitting room has a fireplace at one end flanked by two desks and fronted by a sitting area with a couch and several ornate chairs. Three of the walls are covered with blue silk draperies. The fourth wall is comprised of windows and door that open onto a second floor portico. As you step from this room onto the porch the view is breath taking. To the west is a panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean. From this height the waves look like little ripples in a pond. To the northwest are the rolling hills that lead down to the

coastline. To the north and northeast are the Santa Lucia Mountains. The way in which each successive peak fades in the distance leaves you with the impression that you are standing in the midst of a Renoir painting. The tour guide explains that the Hearsts owned the land as far as the eye could see.

Some days I can't see very far. I can find myself losing focus on the important things in life because there are so many little urgent issues with which I have to wrestle. I walk into my day with high hopes of accomplishing great things and will finish the day thoroughly frustrated because it feels as if little has been done. All kinds of things can capture my attention and begin to drain away the positive attitude with which I started my day. It might be a phone call from a disgruntled committee member, or finding out that someone had questioned my integrity, or walking out of the office after a hard days work and feeling stupid because I had left the lights on in my car and the battery was dead. Sometimes it is an unexpected bill or an accumulation of bills. The washer and dryer may need repaired in the same month and before the month is over I find out that my daughter needs braces. It may be a misunderstanding with my wife, a check that was returned as "non-sufficient funds," a stain on a new pair of pants, or missing travel connections. When my inner resources are depleted, a relatively insignificant problem can ruin my day. Suddenly my circumstances seem to be bigger than life and I can't see past them. In the big scheme of things these minor irritations are nothing more than minor irritations. But when the minor irritations become the focus of my attention, I lose sight of the One who holds the world within His hands.

The Father invites us to come into the house He has prepared for us. If we listen, I believe we may sense a gentle beckoning up to the second floor and into the sitting room. The Father then invites us out onto the porch and says, "Let me show you what I see." From the porch we can see vista upon vista. The waves of the ocean that could batter my little boat look like tiny ripples from this viewpoint. The Father owns everything as far as the eye can see. And nothing escapes His sight. From this vantage point I can see the bigger picture, the important things of life, and I can even catch a glimpse of how my little journey might fit into the plans of the Father.

This view from the second floor portico reminds me of the importance of my family, the brevity of life, the hope of eternity, the grace offered by the Father, and the need for these periodic times of reflection. It is here on the porch, as the Father gives me a chance to see the world from His perspective, that I begin to grasp how we are able to “consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds.” The troubles I have faced today could hardly be considered trials compared to what others are facing. But if I will learn how to handle today’s circumstances with grace and hope and love, then I will certainly be better prepared to handle the tough trials when they come my way. Hopefully I will remember to follow the Father into the house of prayer and spend some time on the second floor porch.

Chapter 18

The Dream Room

Imagination and Prayer

Joseph was a dreamer. One of his dreams (Genesis 37:6) depicted each of his eleven brothers having a sheave of wheat, and the sheaves bowing down to his sheave. In another dream he sees the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. Joseph made the unfortunate choice of sharing the dreams with his brothers. They interpreted the dreams as confirmation of Joseph's arrogance and affirmation of his father's favoritism. So, they sold him to slave-traders who took him to Egypt. There he became infamous for his ability interpret dreams.

Dreams are usually considered trivial distractions from a good night's sleep. However, dreams can be an important part of our spiritual journey. The scriptures provide many references to the way in which God reveals Himself through dreams. In fact, Matthew includes five dreams in his narrative of the birth and protection of the Christ child. Through the centuries, dreams have provided the insight for significant advances in science, inspiration for great works of art, and the basis for major theoretical breakthroughs in psychology.

Scripture indicates that some dreams may tell of things that will happen in the future, such as the dream of Pharaoh in Genesis 41. In this way, it is possible that dreams can be prophetic. However, it is difficult to equate the bizarre nature of most of our dreams to anything divine. We probably believe that God could communicate through our dreams if He wanted to. But, it would appear that either God doesn't want to, or we don't know how to listen. Besides, many of us don't even remember our dreams.

The truth is, everyone dreams every night. In fact, it seems that dreaming is essential to health. Research has shown that if someone is prevented from dreaming for only a few nights, he or she will begin to hallucinate and develop other symptoms of mental fatigue, regardless of the number of hours of sleep he or she has had. Apparently the Hebrew people knew this long before any research was conducted. The Old Testament Hebrew word for health is also translated as the word for dream (see translations of Psalm 126:1). The essential connection between dreaming and health has apparently been known

for thousand of years.

Regardless of your view of dreams, let me suggest several ways in which paying attention to your dreams can enliven your spiritual walk. The first is that dreams foster the imagination. Most of our thinking is bound by the way in which we receive information through our senses. We are limited by our experiences and find it difficult to move beyond that which we can physically see or touch. There is nothing wrong with seeing, but sometimes we must see with the eye of our imagination to tap into the possibilities of our future, or find creative solutions that can carry us past our present problems. When we dream there are far fewer boundaries. We seem to move through time, sometimes fly and often create new combinations of the images of our day. Imagination is not foolishness. It can be just the opposite. Imagination allows us to see beyond the bounds of our defense mechanisms and find hope. It allows us to consider a spiritual realm that transcends what we can see, touch, taste, smell and feel.

Secondly, we dream in images, not words. There are often words in dreams, but the dominant content of a dream is the picture or collection of images that evoke certain emotions. A good speaker is one who is able to create a picture with his or her words. We listen to words, but we emotionally experience pictures or images. Learning to pray with images (using our imagination) moves us from a litany of wordy petitions to an interaction that engages both our minds and hearts. It draws us closer to the goal of loving God with our heart, mind and soul.

Periodically paying attention to our dreams exercises our sensitivity to images and symbols. Scripture is full of symbols, as is church history. Our churches use symbols in their architecture, furnishings and weekly liturgy. We don't worship the symbols, but use them as a means for both proclaiming God's grace and understanding God's grace. A sensitivity to the symbolic nature of the world in which we live, and an awareness of how symbolic actions or images can be received by others can be the difference between communication and misunderstanding, between harmony and bigotry, between reconciliation and retaliation, between peace and war. Jesus asked us to think of his body as bread and his blood as wine so that we might better understand his love. He asked us to imagine our relationship to him as a vine is related to its branches. I want to exercise my imagination so that I can better appreciate these symbols.

Finally, dreams can get me to think about areas of my life that I sometimes avoid. If a dream has content that is particularly disturbing, images that are very memorable, or evoke strong emotions, then it seems appropriate to ask the question, “Is there anything going on in my life to which I should be paying attention? Is there anything I am avoiding? Is there anything that has affected me more than I have been willing to admit?” These questions can mark the start of a fresh (though sometimes difficult) spiritual pathway.

One morning, earlier this week, I awoke from a short dream that had a strong image. Large wrought-iron gates were opening in front of me and I was leaving the cemetery. I used that image to meditate for the next few minutes. I was taken with the thought that I often think of life followed by death. I was reminded that much of the spiritual realm is just the opposite; death is followed by life. A seed dies and it gives birth to an oak tree. A solution to a problem dies and it gives birth to new possibilities. An old way of thinking dies and it gives birth to new relationships. We die to self and are born of the spirit. Our day ends and it gives birth to dreams.

Let the dream room be an extension of your mansion of prayer.

Chapter 19

The Storm Room

Going to the Other Side

Today is May 3rd. On this date, several years ago, Oklahoma City experienced one of the worst tornados on record. There were several funnel clouds, but the most devastating was an F5 tornado with winds that exceeded two hundred miles an hour. The twister came from the Southwest and cut a swath of devastation along the south side of the city that was a half a mile wide. Entire neighborhoods were destroyed and businesses were wiped out. The many tornado drills and the tornado awareness perpetuated by the media probably helped to minimize the loss of life. Grade schools teach the children where to go in case of a storm and most city residents know the safest place in their home to go if a tornado is heading in their direction. Very few Oklahoma homes have basements, so an interior room with no windows or a bathtub with a mattress on top is a good place to wait out the storm.

In the months and years that have followed the storm, sales of storm shelters have risen dramatically. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are installed underneath a garage floor. A trap door allows the residents into the shelter. Once in, there is room to sit, shelves to store emergency food and water, and batteries or generators to provide light and power for communication devices.

A local entrepreneur has developed a king-size shelter bed. The box on which the bed sits is anchored and reinforced to withstand severe winds and weight. The top of the box, along with the mattress, opens up on an hydraulic lift. The residents (space for only two) crawl inside, lie down and close the lid. The box is deep enough to allow for movement, and there is space for some supplies and lighting. However, the quarters would be very cramped for an extended stay.

One of the most popular shelters, particularly for new construction, is called a safe room. The room is typically the size of a large walk-in closet. It sits in the interior of the house and is build with reinforced concrete. It can be finished out in any way the homeowner desires. If there is severe weather, the residents go to the safe room and wait out the storm. I have discovered I need a storm room in my house of prayer.

The storms of my life come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some come with horrendous winds and seem to blow me backwards. Some are accompanied by lightening and thunder. If the noise doesn't frighten me, the lightening can knock me off my feet. Some storms seem to come out of nowhere. The bright sunshine is suddenly overtaken by a dark cloud that kicks up the wind and sends showers all over my well-constructed plans. Other storms start brewing while I am asleep. I go to bed, thinking everything is fine and am awakened to a traumatic event or gut wrenching news that makes sleep seem trivial.

In some storm-filled moments prayer feels like a luxury for which I have no time. In other storms, prayer seems more like a panic where I cry for help, but don't have time to wait for an answer. Sometimes prayer feels like a self-pity party where I whine to God about the injustice of life, or offer sanctimonious statements that attempt to spiritualize (and mask) real feelings of pain, or anger, or resentment.

In Luke 8:22 Jesus said to his disciples that they were going to go to the other side of the lake. They got into the boat and set sail. A storm came up. The disciples were frightened. Apparently they were not convinced of Jesus' words that they were going to go to the other side. Jesus, on the other hand, was asleep, in His own inward storm shelter. He was undaunted and undistracted by the storm. The disciples were unfamiliar with this kind of peace in the midst of life-threatening circumstances. They cry for help. Jesus awakens and calms the storm.

Jesus always hears the cries for help, and prayer is often nothing less than that. However, Jesus' response to the disciples indicates that prayer can be much more than a cry for escape from life's circumstances. Jesus asked the disciples, "Where is your faith?" Jesus had said they were going to the other side. Faith that God would get them through the storm to the other side is different than a prayer to end the storm.

Prayer can transport us to a safe room, a place of refuge, a storm shelter. The storm may be raging all around, but in the prayer room we gain confidence that God is going to get us to where He wants us to be. It is a place of security, not freedom from pain. It is a place of certainty in the midst of questionable or confusing circumstances. It is a place of assurance in spite of the inability to see the other side. The storm room is not a place to live, but rather a place to which one retreats. The storm may last for a while, but there are lessons that can only be learned by sailing through the storm. Unlike a concrete reinforced

storm room, our spiritual one is mobile. We step back into the winds, having partnered with God in creating an inward space that is tethered to Him. We're going to get to the other side.

Chapter 20

The Shower or Bathroom*Naked Vulnerability*

In prayer I often ask the question, “Father, is there a room I should be in today, or is there a room You are in and I could join you?” And then I will be silent and allow my mind to settle. Sometimes I have an image that comes to mind; an image of a room or a place in a room. I then explore what that image might mean to me, or what it might imply about the circumstances I bring with me to prayer.

Sometimes I ask the question and no image seems to come to mind. My imagination seems blank. At those times I choose to revisit rooms in which I have been before. Recently this process took me to the shower or bathroom.

Bathrooms can be very utilitarian or they can be extravagant and luxurious. I prefer the latter to the former. My grandmother’s bathroom had a tub, but no shower fixture. I thought that was rather primitive compared to my childhood home that had a tub with a shower fixture. However, the tub with shower now seems primitive compared to the homes being built today with both shower stalls, whirlpool tubs, double sinks and walk in closets all in the “dressing room suite.”

Twenty years ago I took a group of teens to Toronto, Canada. Among other places, we visited Casa Loma, an amazing castle on the outskirts of the city. The castle was built by Sir Henry Pellatt as his private residence. Construction began in 1911, and took nearly 3 years. Over 300 hundred craftsmen worked on the structure at a cost of about \$3.5 million. Three aspects of the mansion were particularly memorable to me. The first was the 800-foot underground passageway that led from the house to the horse stables. The second was the horse stables themselves. They were nicer than any house in which I had lived (that is not a reference to the cleanliness of the homes in which I lived but rather an acknowledgement of the furnishings in these horse stables). The stables had marble tile floors, huge chandeliers and intricate woodcarvings.

The third amazing feature of the house was Sir Henry’s private bathroom. The walls of the shower were all done in white marble. But most impressive was the shower. It was built so that the body would be completely surrounded by water spray. There were

six taps that controlled three levels of pipes (www.casaloma.org). That's my kind of shower.

Sometimes I enter into prayer and am caught up with all the needs of my day, or all the needs that I want to bring before the Lord. There is tension in my heart that translates into a tension in my muscles. I often don't realize my anxiety until I notice that I am doing all the talking. Like a cleansing shower, prayer can begin to wash the tension away. A morning shower is often utilitarian, a part of the preparation for the day. An evening shower often serves to cleanse one from the grime of a day's work, and also serves to relax the body from the day's efforts. The warm water spray can relax tight muscles and loosen stiff joints. The tension begins to dissipate. The Spirit takes us to the same place. You may sense the Spirit asking, "Why are you so anxious? Who is in control? Do you not trust? Why don't you relax and let My grace flow over you."

Prayer is both cleansing and renewing. Some may prefer the image of a bath over the image of a shower. The advertising slogan, "Calgon, take me away" was an appeal to the ability of a bubble bath to separate one from the troubles of the day. In a similar way, prayer can allow us to sink into the rich fragrant warmth of God's care. Problems that seem so big begin to assume their proper size. Despair begins to give way to hope. Tense control begins to release its grip and makes room for surrender to God's orchestration.

The other day I was praying with a friend of mine. He was facing some incredibly difficult problems and decisions. He was hurting. As I began to pray, the image of a bath came to mind. I prayed that God would allow him to catch his breath. That he could allow the anxiety of his circumstances to dissipate and take a bath in the grace and love of his Creator. I asked that the warm water of God's presence would soothe and renew. I prayed that he would not feel rushed, but that he could feel he had all the time he needed to sink deep into the divine, and feel that weightlessness that comes with knowing God is in control, and loves us more than we could ever love ourselves. I acknowledged that there is a sense of vulnerability that comes with taking a bath. However, as we become convinced that God loves us completely, naked vulnerability becomes part of the healing and renewing of our spirit.

I don't know if the image of a bath helped my friend, but it provided me with a way by which to convey my prayers to the Creator. Consider what the bath might look like in

your Mansion of prayer. See if you can imagine being showered in His love, cleansed by His presence and bathed in the warmth of His grace.

Chapter 21

Coat Closet

Creating Space

As you walk into our home, you step onto a white ceramic tiled area called the entryway. There is a mirror to the left, bordered by a candle sconce. The ceiling is about 10 feet high with a light fixture hanging down about two feet. To the right is a peg board on which we have hung a collection of hats, scarves, jackets and the dog leash. I have been in art museums where that collection would pass for a piece of modern art, but in our home it is simply a utilitarian storage area. It is not an eyesore. In fact, quite the contrary. I think it makes the place feel like home and gives any guest an immediate sense of who we are. A home should do that. It should embody some of the characteristics of the people who live within its walls. A house of prayer should do the same. The rooms in your house, though they may have the same names as the rooms of your neighbor's house, should look very different than the rooms of anyone else on the block. Our home is personal. That doesn't mean we don't share it with others. In fact, a vital part of being hospitable is inviting others into our home. I have taken many ideas from other peoples homes, and incorporated them into my own home (both physically and spiritually). I am honored when others like what I have done and modify it for their own use.

One of my home projects was the entryway closet. The door into the closet is just to the left of the peg board on which the hats are hung. The original design of the closet was rather odd. Immediately upon opening the door you face the clothes bar on which we would hang coats and seasonal items. However, the closet is about five feet deep. At the back of the closet were four shelves on which we would place the kids games, books and videos. The problem was that in order to get to the shelves you had to separate the coats, squeeze past them, into a space you could hardly move, make your selection and then try to get out without knocking all the clothes off their hangers. We lived with that situation for several years until the closet became so crowded that there was no room to stand. You couldn't get to anything because there was too much in the closet.

I am not a carpenter, but I knew I could design a better structure for this closet. I dreamed, planned, drew pictures and bought supplies. I told the family that the closet was

off limits for one week. I emptied everything out and went to work. A double clothes bar was placed at the back of the closet and new shelves were placed along the side. Hooks were placed along the opposite side and everything was given a fresh coat of paint. The hanging space was nearly doubled and shelf space was increased by 50%. In addition, it actually became a walk-in closet. The new design created space and room to move around. I am particularly proud of this closet because it is one of my few successful construction projects.

This is obviously not a book on building projects, but it is a book on spiritual construction. The cluttered closet is an accurate picture of how my journey often becomes so cluttered that there is no room for anything to take place. I am sometimes relieved that God has not revealed His will to me because I am not sure I have any time left in my schedule, or any energy left at the end of the day to consider anything that God might want with my day. Many of us in this culture take pride in our busyness, gloat over a long work week and compare “to-do” lists as if they were as important as pictures of our children. We are intimidated by silence, afraid of being alone and petrified of not being in control of our own agenda. There is no time for God to work, no space to hear His voice, and no room to change direction. We are secure in the pressure of our own clutter. But, it doesn’t work. We are usually left frustrated and unsatisfied because there is no life.

I have a friend who is dieing of cancer. The cancer is a very rare form that affects the abdomen. His is the only case of this type of cancer ever diagnosed in the county in which he lives. The cancer cells multiply and produce a liquid that fills up the abdominal cavity. Every two weeks he has to have his abdomen drained of the fluid. He has had as much as two liters drained in one session. The problem is that the doctors can’t get to all of the liquid. The liquid that is left behind forms into a harder gelatin-like substance. Over time the gelatin takes up more and more space in the abdominal cavity. My friend looks pregnant and the internal pressure is very painful. Those who have this disease almost invariably die from the gelatin taking up too much space in the abdomen. The rest of the internal organs have no room to function. A person cannot live unless there is room for the internal organs to move and function properly. In the same way, a person cannot live spiritually unless there is room for the Spirit within to function properly.

Exploring the Mansion of prayer is an exercise in creating space. Jesus admonishes his disciples that when they pray they should go into the closet and close the door. (Matthew 6:6). Most of us have closets (lives) that are so cluttered that we can't even get into the closet, much less shut the door. It is time for a reconstruction project. Redesign your closet in the Mansion of prayer. It is your home. You have the power to do so. You may have to tell others that certain times of your day are "off limits" until you figure out what the new design will look like. You may have to empty the closet and rebuild. Whatever it takes, creating space is an essential component of life. Without it you will surely die. With it you will create new life and energy for all the other areas of your journey.

Chapter 22

Laundry Room

The Sacred Mundane

The Ironman Triathlon competition is one of the most grueling athletic events anywhere in the world. It requires strength and speed and strategy, but most of all, it requires endurance. The Iron Man is a race that begins with a 2.4-mile swim. This is immediately followed by a 112-mile bike ride. The race concludes with the running of a full marathon, which is a 26.2-mile run. There is no resting between events. Participants come out of the water, following the swim, put on a pair of shoes and begin the bike ride. At the end of the bike ride they set their bikes down and begin the run.

The world championship for this event is held in October of each year in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. The swimming takes place in the ocean, the bike ride goes through lava fields that reach temperatures of well over 100 degrees, and the terrain for the marathon includes several grueling hills and slow inclines. Top athletes can finish this event in less than nine hours. However, there are some who may take 20 hours or more before they complete the course.

One of my favorite cartoons is by Dan Reynolds. It depicts five middle-aged men in sleeveless t-shirts, each with a number pinned to their shirts. With flabby arms and droopy bellies they each are intently engaged in pressing the clothes on their individual ironing boards. Above them is a banner that reads, "Ironman Competition." Now that's a contest I might be able to win. Beyond the humorous play on words, there is actually a significant connection between the Ironman athletic event and the depiction of men at an ironing board. Both require a particular type of endurance.

Life is a marathon, not a sprint. We often speak of the big events of life. We celebrate anniversaries, plan for big moments and anticipate holiday gatherings. The same is true spiritually. We testify about conversion, give thanks for an answered prayer, and labor over a lapse in character. However, most of life is lived in the ordinary, everyday experiences. Much of life is routine and repetitious. I won't testify about doing the laundry or ironing the clothes, but those tasks certainly consume a good chunk of time.

Many of us follow the same routine five mornings a week. There is a routine to the day, a rhythm to the week, and a pattern to the month. The repetitious tasks are not wasted time. Quite the contrary. The routine is often essential.

The Ironman Competition and the ironing of clothes both require endurance. And, life requires endurance. In the Mansion of prayer the laundry room can represent that place where we pray about the routine of life. Grace is needed to endure. And the joy of the Lord can be infused into the ordinary. Prayer can be a way by which we commit the ordinary to God. However, this is not the only significance to the laundry room.

Not only does life often feel routine, but prayer can feel routine. At those times it is easy to question the value of prayer, or doubt the efficacy of the effort. “Routine” doesn’t sound compatible with “spiritual life.” “Mundane” doesn’t seem right when we are supposed to have “the joy of the Lord.” However, there are lessons that can only be learned in the daily routine of life. Spiritual strength is developed as we engage in the exercise of endurance. Exploring the Mansion of prayer is a way by which we can infuse new energy into the routine of the spiritual disciplines. But, it is not the only way. Some find it refreshing to repeat the Lord’s Prayer, or pray scripture. Others memorize scripture. The Catholic tradition of praying the Rosary is an exercise in repetition. Once the prayers have been committed to memory, the individual is free to allow the prayers to be applied to the particular circumstances of the day.

Entering into the Mansion of Prayer sometimes requires work. Just as maintaining a home requires vacuuming, doing the dishes, dusting, laundry and ironing, so maintaining a spiritual home requires that the resident participate in the spiritual disciplines. The purpose of the disciplines is training, exercise and preparation. And then, over time we begin to realize that most of life is in the routine. And, when the routine becomes infused with the Divine we experience a strength and stability that can only come over time. We begin to realize that watching what God does in the ordinary is every bit as important as the big events. And, engaging in spiritual discipline gives us permission to celebrate even when the journey seems routine. “Father, I think I’ll do some ironing this morning.”

Chapter 23
The Basement
Confronting Fear

When I was a sophomore in high school my parents let me stay home alone while they went to an overnight church function. I was very glad that they trusted me and was excited about having the house to myself. After school I made a snack and the time passed quickly. I don't remember having any homework to do, so I played basketball, watched a little TV and ate some supper.

As darkness fell I started hearing the noises that one never notices during the day. A tree branch brushing up against a window sounds like a burglar testing the window locks. Furnace noises sound like monsters in the living room. And, a squirrel on the roof sounds like a serial killer dropping from the attic into the upstairs hallway. The only remedy is to turn on more lights and turn up the volume on the television. I was trying to act brave, but it was difficult to be brave.

For many of us, our behavior changes when we are home alone at night. The first safety precaution, after checking the locks, is to turn lights on in the areas you are going before any lights are turned off in the areas where you have been. Secondly, you must completely avoid certain areas of the house. For example, this particular night I wanted to avoid the living room and dining room because there were too many good places for someone to jump out and scare my socks off.

I absolutely had to avoid the basement. We had single-board stairs leading to the basement. This meant that if you walked down the stairs, someone under the staircase could grab your ankles, pull you through the open space between the stairs and you would never be heard from again! I had mastered the technique of supporting my weight with my arms on the handrail and leaping the entire length of the staircase. However, being home alone at night meant that, any trip to the basement was too risky.

I watched TV late that night, partly because I could and partly because I wanted to be good and tired before I went to bed. Eventually I made my way upstairs. This area of the house had its own safety regulations. I would leap past the guestroom (cold and dark, the

perfect conditions for zombies). Check under the bathroom sink (who wants to be grabbed by the legs while brushing your teeth), throw back the shower curtain (using the element of surprise on the unfortunate and incompetent thief who may be hiding in the tub) and checking the corners of the bedroom closet (to ensure that the shoes under the hanging clothes did not have legs attached to them).

When I closed my door to the bedroom that night I didn't feel very secure. The door seemed to thin and the lock seemed too fragile. If I sensed someone in the hallway, I had my escape route ready. I would go out the window onto the garage roof and down the corner of the house where the brick pattern provided good footholds. However, I needed more time to get out the window than the flimsy door would provide. So I lined up the furniture from the bedroom door to the opposite wall. The dresser was now in front of the door, then the night stands, followed by a chair and then my bed. I crawled under the covers, left the light on, and stared at the doorknob to catch the first sign of any movement.

As the minutes slowly passed, I glanced to the left of the doorframe. There hung two small plaques my mom had hung years before. The first read "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1)." The second, just beneath it, read, "Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there (anonymous)."

We all have fears. Some fears are simply unsettling, while others are completely debilitating. Some people have learned to completely avoid those things that are frightening, much like I tried to avoid going in the basement. However, confronting our fears can be a step of incredible personal and spiritual growth.

Confronting fears is not easy. All of us have a natural instinct toward safety. Some seem willing to take more risks than others, but they do so because they have an expanded sense of their own safety parameters. Confronting our fears requires that we step into a place where we cannot use the safety net.

Prayer is the ideal place to confront fear. As we explore the mansion of prayer we find that it is a shelter in the midst of a storm, a warm fire in the midst of a frigid rain, a safe refuge to be visited anytime of day or night. The loving Father invites us in to our home and abides with us. In the context of His embracing love, we are invited to open the door to our fears.

I have had people who have explored their own mansion of prayer tell me of places that felt frightening. One middle-aged woman told me that as she prayed she saw a box by a curtain. She felt like she wanted to open it, but was anxious about what might be inside. An older gentleman told of a recurring dream (see dream room) that someone was chasing him and trying to kill him. He would awaken frightened and in a cold sweat. Prayer took over where the dream ended and he began to explore his own fears of anger and inadequacy.

One young man told me that as he prayed and asked God to guide him to the room in which he should be, he kept having the image of a basement come to mind. He didn't particularly want to be in the basement. It made him very uncomfortable, yet that was the image that kept coming to mind. He asked my advice. I suggested to him that we often store in our basement (or attic) things that we don't want to be part of our daily life anymore, but seem too important to throw away. We box up memories or items that connect us to our past and store them away.

I asked the young man if there were any experiences of his past that he had stored away, but never processed. Were there any issues he had been afraid to confront? Were there any boxes that needed to be unpacked? The best place to do so is in the Mansion of prayer. The young man's countenance changed. He slowly shook his head as if he knew exactly what he needed to do. He simply said thank you, and walked away.

Prayer is both a place of retreat and a place for growth. The Creator comforts, affirms and loves us just as we are. However, His love draws us into wholeness. And, wholeness requires that we confront our true self with all its fears, anxieties, hurts, anger and pain. There is no better place to take this journey than in the mansion where the Creator promises to abide with us and assures us that eventually we will be able to walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear nothing (Psalm 23:4), not even the basement stairs.

Chapter 24

The Pool and Guest House*He Found Me*

I was on the ninth floor of a hotel in Houston, Texas. The next morning I was scheduled to speak to a large gathering of teenagers and youth leaders. I sat quietly in my room, but inwardly my emotions were starting to boil. Feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty began to percolate to the surface. I particularly struggled with the sense of vulnerability that comes with sharing your personal Mansion of prayer with people you don't know. Even more anxiety comes with being vulnerable with acquaintances that know you enough to like you, but may not if they knew all your faults. Some of those folks would be in the audience as well.

I went downstairs to sit by the hotel pool in the hopes that doing so might calm my spirit. As I sat there looking at the water, I asked the Lord if my mansion had a pool. In the many times I had prayed using the imagery of the Mansion of prayer, I had never thought about the pool. My mind began to gather memories of the many pools I had seen. Both my daughters love to swim, so our family vacations always consider whether or not our destination has a pool.

My mind began to focus on a sixth grade experience when I was invited to a friend's house for a pool party. His was the nicest house I had ever been to (see Gymnasium). The home was set on beautiful wooded acreage. A small lake wrapped around one portion of the property. Behind the house was the pool. Along the right side were five fountains shooting water into the pool. To the left was the guesthouse. I was familiar with guestrooms, but I had never heard of, much less seen, a guesthouse. I liked it. I liked it a lot.

At that moment my nostalgic reflection was interrupted and I felt an assurance that it was okay to invite guests to my mansion. The Creator had prepared a place where they could stay, and it was safe. However, my uncertainty persisted. And then, a very strange image came to mind. It was an image of a lamb. The creature made its way up the sloping

landscape between the pond and the pool. My mind went to the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15). This is the story of a shepherd who had 100 sheep. When one was lost he left the 99 to search for the one that was lost. In the midst of my anxiety over what other people might think, my Creator assures me of what He thinks. He created me. He searched for me. He found me. He rejoices over me. My anxiety began to subside and was replaced by the assurance of His affirmation. Now, when my prayers take me to the pool in the Mansion of prayer, I often consider the sheep that are grazing on the hillside just beside it. They represent my Father's passionate love and acceptance.

Prayer is a time to express anxieties. Prayer can be a time of reassurance. Prayer is the creation of space for the Creator to provide a vision of something greater than the pressing circumstances you may be facing. Prayer is a deep cleansing breath. Prayer is a retreat from the blasting heat of frustration and uncertainty, and a dip in the cool waters of grace, affirmation, and unconditional love.

Chapter 25

The Garden

Hardened Clay

I enjoy walking. The journey may take me through the skyscrapers of Chicago, Illinois, or the farms of El Reno, Oklahoma. I just enjoy the sights and sounds. I enjoy meandering through gardens and seeing the endless variety of plants and the beautiful colors of various blooms. In a similar way, prayer is a meandering through thoughts, issues and feelings. It is a contemplation of the endless variety of God's creation and the beautiful colors with which He adorns our growth.

Sometimes prayer is meandering through scripture and allowing its images to form a pathway in which to walk. The Lord's references to the garden are a good place to begin meandering.

- See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these (Matthew 6:28b-29, NIV).
- Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit (Matthew 12:33, NIV).
- A farmer went out to sow his seed. Some fell along the path. Some fell on rocky places. Other seed fell among thorns. Still other seed fell on good soil (Matthew 13:3b-8, NIV).
- While you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow until the harvest (Matthew 13:29b, 30a, NIV).
- Though [the mustard seed] is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches (Luke 13:19)
- A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how (Mark 4:26b-27, NIV).
- I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor (John 4:38, NIV).

- I am the vine and my Father is the gardener (John 15:1, NIV).
- I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5, NIV).
- This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:8, NIV).
- They went to a place (garden) called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray" (Mark 14, 32, NIV).
- Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed (Genesis 2:8, NIV).
- Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8b, NIV).
- I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys (Song of Songs 2:1).
- You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly (Psalm 65:9, NIV).
- The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green (Psalm 92:12-14, NIV).
- Flowers appear on earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance (Song of Songs 2:12-13b, NIV).
- You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water (Song of Songs 4:5b, NIV).
- My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my lover's and my lover is mine (Song of Songs 6:2-3b, NIV).

Is there a season that describes your current stage of life? Is your spiritual garden neatly manicured? Overgrown? Choked with weeds?

We live in Oklahoma. When we first bought our house it had a front "garden" comprised of three bushes and a few weeds. One day I decided to create a nice garden design around the bushes. Prior to starting I was completely unfamiliar with Oklahoma soil. Much of the area has high clay content which explains the reputation the state has for red dirt. When the clay soil dries up, it becomes incredibly hard (like brick). That spring we had gotten very little rain and I felt like I was digging through concrete. I completely

ruined one shovel and found that a one-day project turned into a two week incarceration. I finally got a few things planted. For two years I kept blending mulch and compost with the clay to get it to a good garden consistency.

When I fail to pray I feel like I become like hardened clay. Nothing can penetrate my calluses. I may feel like the hard shell protects me from being hurt, but it actually prevents anything from taking root and producing life. Prayer softens the soil. It nourishes the clay and allows the seeds to take root. Prayer invites the Master to create a beautiful and aromatic garden filled with life and passion and joy.

“I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of Man discloses. And He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own; and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known” (C. Austin Miles, *The Rodeheaver Co., International*, 1938).

Chapter 26

The Dining Room

Eating with the Enemy

What could be better than a great dining experience? I enjoy going to a nice restaurant and perusing the menu for the exact entree that will match the cravings I have that particular evening. I hope my wife will order an interesting dish as well so that I can have a bite of hers.

Not only do I enjoy eating a good meal, but I also enjoy preparing a good meal. There is a sweet gratification that comes when family and friends enjoy what I have cooked. There is something about sharing a meal that breaks down barriers, enhances communication and strengthens the bonds of relationship. Whether it is sharing a cup of coffee at a Java café, scooping out casseroles at a pot-luck dinner, or having a hamburger after watching a movie, dining with others builds friendships.

On Monday evenings, for four hours, I attend a class at a local university. For a six-week period the professor divided us up into groups of four students each. We were in competition with one another in a business game. The stakes were high because grades were on the line. We remained congenial with one another, but the tone of the room had changed. The camaraderie that had developed over many months was beginning to dissipate. The competition was intense.

I was responsible for dinner on the third Monday of this particular class. Often, the class ordered pizza. Students would take a few slices and then go back to their groups to continue building their strategy to out-play the other teams. For this night I decided to prepare a special meal. I spent the day shopping, chopping and cooking. I got to class early and set up the serving area in the back of the classroom. Class began and the aromas began to be a bit distracting. At the supper break my fellow students enjoyed an appetizer of fresh black-bean, corn salsa with cilantro and lime juice (surrounded by chips). Next was a mixed-greens salad topped with pears, walnuts, red peppers, served with a homemade dressing. Beside that was a chilled broccoli, bacon, onion and sunflower seed salad. Next, I had prepared a smoked brisket that had been basting for seven hours. This

was accompanied by a green rice dish. At the end was a nice light dessert. It was my gift to my classmates. I loved doing it. What I found most interesting was that the tone of the room seemed to change. People actually took a break from their work. The conversations increased. Compliments were given. People went back for seconds and teased one another about their portions.

Now, the change didn't last the entire night, but while we were eating the atmosphere was light and refreshing. The Psalmist says that the Lord will "prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:5a, NIV). Something happens when we dine with those who stand in opposition to us.

Jesus instructs us to pray for our enemies. We often think of our enemies as those who are fighting wars against our troops in foreign countries. Or we may think of those who have treated us unjustly, or those who are our political opponents. And, it is appropriate to pray in such a way. However, there is another type of enemy. There is an enemy who affects our outlook on life. There are people who may be unaware of the affect they have, but nevertheless, can destroy your day. They are not enemies because they have any malevolence toward you or me, but rather because of the defenses and attitudes in us that react so strongly to who they are and what they do. There are individuals whose wealth may trigger your envy, those whose arrogance stirs your bitterness, those whose naiveté fuels your sarcasm, those whose attitude robs your joy, those whose pessimism destroys your dreams, those whose choices ruin your plans, and those whose competitive spirit steals the fun out of every activity. They injure your spirit. They are enemies of health, wholeness and peace.

What exacerbates the problem is that usually these people are not strangers. They tend to be acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues or relatives. If you pray for these enemies, you cannot do so with detached vague language like you might use in a prayer for a political leader of another country whom you have never met. No, to pray for these enemies of your soul's peace requires that you get personal with your prayers. Ultimately it drives you to confront the enemy within, the attitudes, jealousies and resentment that percolates within and is simply released by those outward enemies who somehow have the uncanny ability to push all the buttons that trigger those reactions.

I think one of the best images for this type of prayer is the dining room in the

Mansion of prayer. Here you can visualize that the Lord has prepared a table for you in the presence of your enemies. In prayerful images, picture who might be pulling up a chair to the table.

The first time I began to pray in this manner I asked the Lord if I could invite anyone I wanted. I had this feeling that this would be a triumphant moment where God would show my enemies how wrong they were, point out their faults and justify my anger. However, I was taken back with the thought that if I could invite anyone I wanted, God would be inviting some guests of His own to the dinner table. My invitation to an “enemy” who had ignored me was accompanied by God’s invitation to the “enemy” of jealousy that resided within me. My invitation to an “enemy” who had damaged my reputation was accompanied by God’s invitation to the “enemy” of unforgiveness that was turning my joy into bitterness. Go around the table and introduce the guests. Some are the guests that you have invited. Maybe others are guests that the Lord has invited. Are there any enemies from within seated at the table? Do you know their names? Is envy seated there? How about control, perfectionism or need-for-approval?

The prayer may feel very awkward at first. Dining with enemies usually is. Maybe it is a dinner party with many guests and you imagine what it would be like if the arrogant colleague sat next to the sarcastic relative. Or, maybe it is an intimate dinner with only one or two guests. You may find that the host of the banquet is actually the one against whom you are angry. The conversation may go places you never dreamed possible. Maybe the wealthy acquaintance is seated next to the insecure self. Here in the dining room God asks you to pray for both of them. Prayers are to be offered on behalf of everyone who sits at the table. Here enemies and friends alike are in need of nourishment and fellowship. Put the weapons down, let the defenses relax. It is time to sit down at the banquet table. It is time to pray for the enemies without and the enemies within. Somehow I don’t think saying grace before a meal will ever be the same.

Chapter 27

The Workroom

A Work in Progress

There are many graduating university students who have no idea what the following year might hold. After six years of grade school, two years of middle school, four years of high school and four years of college they still have no answer to the question, “What will you be doing next year?” However, there are also middle-aged adults who have no answer for that question either.

We spend an enormous amount of energy planning and organizing our lives so that we can exert some level of control over our destiny or future. We set goals, make investments, send out invitations, fill-in calendars and extend our education. All of these exercises can be good and healthy. However, if our security is in our plans, then we are likely on a collision course with frustration and despair because there will always be circumstances that are beyond our control and that ruin our plans.

Prayer may lead us to plan for the future, but it also teaches us to hold plans loosely. It helps us to see the inevitability of change and to do better at stepping in rhythm with change. Our culture emphasizes knowledge, reason and logic. For some, the most uncomfortable statement is to say, “I don’t know.” The story of Adam and Eve depict the first humans seeking out the tree of knowledge. That pursuit, to the exclusion of obedience, caused a breach in their relationship with the Creator. Prayer forces us to realize that there is much we do not know.

My daughters’ bedrooms are constantly changing. As they grow older, their tastes change and their interests change. This sometimes results in a new color of paint on the walls, a different piece of furniture, new pictures above the desk, or a different cover for the bed. When I embark on the project to change one of their rooms, my youngest always asks if she can help with the painting. She likes both the brush and the roller. I don’t think she makes the work go faster (though I do know the clean up takes longer), however, she certainly makes the work more joyful. I love having her help.

I know what their rooms look like today, but I have no idea what they will look like in a year. Their lives, and mine for that matter, are in a constant state of construction. As a

result there is so much that I don't know, and certainly cannot control.

Every once in awhile I start on a project for one of my girl's rooms. Because I am not a carpenter or a craftsman I rarely have everything I need to complete the project. Inevitably I will have to go to the home improvement store to try and find what I do not have. On several occasions I have had a store clerk offer assistance, and my reply has been, "I don't know exactly what I am looking for, but I think I will know it when I see it." Many of my prayers follow this same pattern. I pray for my daughter and her unknown future. I pray for a friend with an uncertain diagnosis. I pray for decisions that may have serious consequences. I pray, but I have no idea how to pray. I am in a room under construction, but I don't know what it will look like when it is completed. It is the room of unknowing. The room of unknowing is a place where knowledge gives way to surrender, a place where reason yields to intuition, where the tangible is shadowed by the divine. It is a place for the prayer of serenity.

The room of unknowing can be an uncomfortable room, because of our incredible need to know and control. And yet, I have come to learn that God can take my elementary notions of room design and my weak attempts at wielding a brush, and incorporate them into His creation of a room fit for a queen. Sometimes a prayer for my wife, or a prayer for my sister, or a prayer for myself draws me into this room under construction. I don't know what to pray. I just sit and try to let my Father know that if He wants me to do any painting, I am ready. I don't know exactly what the room will look like, but I will know it when I see it.

Chapter 28

The Family Room*Drop the Pretense*

There is always the danger of creating spiritual "formulas" that dictate how we pursue spiritual growth. Just as God cannot be contained by any description we might make of Him, so spiritual growth cannot be limited or controlled by the ways in which we think God is supposed to work in our lives. His ways are beyond our ways and His thoughts beyond our thoughts.

The "formula" of this book is that when we enter into a time of prayer, we ask, "Lord, is there a room in which I should be, or is there a room where I might join You?" However, this question is never intended to dictate the way in which we engage in prayer or to limit the way in which we conceive of God working. It is simply a starting point or a door (one of many) into the place the Creator has prepared for us.

Sometimes I enter into the Mansion of Prayer and wait for an image to capture my attention, but nothing seems to come into focus. When that occurs I do one of three things. Sometimes I choose a room and think of the meaningful images or previous lessons learned in that room. At other times I see if my prayer requests, or needs, naturally draw me to a particular room. The third response is to simply go to the family room.

In our house, the family room is the area where a lot of living takes place. There is a fireplace, which is the center of attention during cold winter nights. The family room is a comfortable room where feet can go on the furniture and pillows can be tossed on the floor. It is a place to snack, relax, talk and do homework. It is a place to curl up in a chair with a good book, or have a group of friends over to watch a game. It is a place for school projects, building indoor tents and opening Christmas gifts. The family room is where pretense is dropped and conversations begin.

If you feel lost in prayer, go to the family room and hang out. Try to let prayer take on the nature of fellowship. Let it change your spiritual attire from dress shoes to slippers or socks. Let the tension in your shoulders loosen and nestle into the big cushioned chair. Let prayer help you to see the humor in awkward situations, the opportunities in difficult circumstances and the joy in simple pleasures. Let prayer be relaxed conversation by the

warm fire. Share the day and plan the tomorrow. Let Christmas happen throughout the year by allowing the love of the Creator to be born in the midst of your ordinary day.

Chapter 29

The Gallery

The Prayer of Meditation

Many of the world's great mansions have become a repository for great works of art. In fact, many great art museums, such as The Louvre in Paris, were originally built as estates for the elite. Art can be a great source for spiritual reflection and inspiration. The wonderful writer, Henri Nouwen, spent weeks and months contemplating the Rembrandt work entitled "The Return of the Prodigal," and then wrote about his reflections in a book by the same name.

Art provides a fresh or different way by which to see the world. The artist sees with eyes that recognize the unique, capture the essence and discern the emotion of a subject or situation. Art betrays the heart of the artist, captures the heart of the subject, and transforms the heart of the patron. Great art allows the observer to transpose his or her own experiences into the images of the artwork to produce personal reflections that transcend even what the artist might have intended. Art can be the prayer of an artist. For the spiritual pilgrim, it can also be the inspiration for prayerful reflection.

I have a piece of original art hanging in my office. It is a large abstract work that has been a discussion starter for many conversations. I love talking to others about it when they inquire as to what it is or what it means. I enjoy explaining what I know about the artist and how her spiritual journey influences her art. I like to describe what the images have come to mean to me; that light always breaks through the darkness, that God's word brings light and life, and that redemption is a primary characteristic of God's nature. But most of all, I simply like to look at it.

For me, the art gallery in the Mansion of prayer represents the prayer of reflection and meditation. Here we reflect on the work of others who have walked this same earth and have been willing to share their observations and reactions. We learn from those who have gone before us. By standing on their shoulders we gain a better view of our own circumstances. Art can help us to exercise our spiritual eyes, stretch us beyond our self-imposed boundaries, and open us up to areas of the soul yet unexplored. One should

cultivate the discipline of periodically visiting the art gallery. The eyes of our soul need the exercise.

Chapter 30

The Ballroom

Dancing with the King

The fact that King David danced before the Lord has always been problematic for me. Originally it was problematic because, when I was growing up, the people of my church thought that dancing could be harmful to your spiritual health. As a result, during fifth grade P.E. class, while the other boys and girls were learning to square dance, I was running the record player. At an early age I had become a "conscientious objector."

Somehow I missed the broken logic that made it permissible for me to play the dance music so that others could slip into moral decay, but not permissible for me to actually move to the music. However, I employed that same logic during the summer of my sixth grade year. We were on summer vacation. I returned to the cabin after having been with some friends. Mom and dad were at the cabin with some friends of their own, but they stopped their conversation long enough to ask where I had been. I said that the boys had been playing poker. Poker was another taboo at the church we attended. My mom was quick to handle this issue, and said, "Dee, you know we have told you not to play poker." To which I boldly responded, using the same logic I had learned in dance class, "I wasn't playing poker, I was just the dealer."

In more recent years, David's dance has not been problematic because of a prohibition on rhythmic movements to music, but rather because I have very little rhythm with which to move to music. I am not sure anyone, particularly God, would be blessed with what I would do on a dance floor. However, I recently read a wonderful quote that said, "Dance as if no one is watching you, love as if you have never been hurt before, sing as if no one can hear you, live as though heaven is on earth" (Souza). Sometimes music both moves me, and makes me want to move. Music, like art, has a deeply spiritual side to it. And, music that touches the soul can easily move the limbs.

Dance is both spontaneous and taught. It can be both individually expressive, and corporately choreographed. Prayer is very similar. It is a spontaneous expression of the spirit within us, but it is also something that can be enhanced through sound teaching. It is as personal as the individual, but can also be done on behalf of the community.

We have an obligation to teach our children and grandchildren how to pray. Even if we have no children we should look for opportunities to offer help in this important spiritual discipline. The problem is that we often teach children how to pray public prayers. There is nothing wrong with instructions on how to pray in public, because corporate prayers enforce the nature of community. Jesus used plural pronouns when he taught his disciples to pray: "Our Father...Give us...forgive us...as we forgive...lead us not...deliver us..." (Matthew 6:9,11,12 & 13, NIV). We live in community, share each other's joys, and bear each other's burdens. There is a time and a place for public prayers, but when this is all that children learn (or for that matter, when it is all that adults learn), prayer times can become dry, stagnant and ultimately are often avoided.

Many mansions contain a ballroom. Here guests gather to dance and to watch the dance. It is also a place where one can learn to dance. The ballroom in the Mansion of Prayer can be a place where one listens to the prayers of others. Reading the prayers of St. Francis, Teresa of Avila, George Mueller or Peter Marshall can provide great insight into how others have used this spiritual discipline. One may experiment with praying scripture, conversational prayer, spiritual meditation or prayerful singing. However, eventually each person must move into private instructions from the Master. Jesus gives instruction to His disciples, and teaches them to pray. He cautions against public prayers that are for show, and encourages them to learn how to pray privately (see Matthew 6:5-6). Private prayer is very different than corporate prayer. The ballroom can be a place to learn both.

Chapter 31

Master Bedroom

Divine Intimacy

Every year our city has a home and garden show. A home is selected and then various design companies are each given a room to present their unique style, skills and wares. The result is a home that displays extreme opulence and extravagance, but has very little thematic continuity. This year's home sits directly across the street from an exclusive country club. The brick circle-drive of the home encompasses a blue-tile fountain, and is covered by a large angular roof extension that protects all guests from inclement weather.

The home has a modern kitchen, a pool and cabana, a dining room large enough to hold two tables, and a movie theatre with seating for thirty. However, the most striking feature of the home is the master bedroom suite. As one enters the space, the first thing one notices is how big the space is. The use of glass, color, mirrors and high ceilings create a sense of private openness.

The modern canopy-post bed is elevated on a platform and sits against one wall of the bedroom. The wall to the right of the door is mirrored, another one is glass overlooking the gardens, and the third is completely open into the seating area and baths. The seating area faces a stand-alone fireplace. Beyond that is a reflecting pool as large as the driveway fountain, to the left a sunken shower for him, and to the right a round raised whirlpool tub with overhead skylight for her. The his and her walk-in closets are not enclosed by doors, but rather visually separated by walls that simply divide the space, but do not separate the space. There is an area for meditation, his and her saunas, his and her sink areas, and an adjoining space that has a larger sunken whirlpool with a small kitchenette, wet bar, and loft which includes an area for reading and relaxing.

The suite is large enough that you would never have to see your mate. Though that may be appealing to some couples, it is not appealing to me. The master bedroom is a place for intimate connection, not virtual separation. I am surprised the misguided design team had not built his and her beds.

Many prayers lack connection. They may be elaborate and take up a lot of space, but

they miss that for which prayer is intended; intimacy. Prayer is a place where unconditional love produces a response of vulnerability. It is a time when lovers talk, and lovers touch and lovers feel. The master bedroom is the place that produces the poetry of the Song of Songs. It is the sacred romance, the honeymoon suite, and the lover's loft. It is the expression of the scriptural images of the bride and groom. It is an intercourse that sometimes requires no words, and that for which words inadequately describe.

My parents always kept their bedroom door open at night. Mom said she always wanted to be able to hear her children if they called for help. Late at night I would often hear muffled conversation coming from my parents' room. One night I decided to satiate my curiosity and find out what they were saying. I quietly got out of bed, crawled out to the hallway, and then made my way to their door on my elbows and stomach like an army trooper under enemy fire. I stopped just short of their room with my head resting against the doorframe, just out of sight of their bed. I listened. They were talking about dad's day at work! After listening to five minutes of boring conversation I crawled back to my room.

Years later I have come to realize that the road to passion is paved with the day's experiences. Hearing the heart of my lover, and sharing those things that affect my inmost being, cement the bond of our relationship. The experiences that are initially characterized as "his" and "hers," become "ours." And, the master suite becomes the place where lovers meet. In other words, with both our spouse and our Creator, the daily interactions become a vehicle that takes us to divine intimacy.

Chapter 32

The Saturday Room

The Place for Hard Projects

Another page is torn off the daily calendar and the work week is over. Saturday has arrived and the time has come to tackle some of those projects that have been waiting for enough time, or for just the right part, or for a new approach. There is a place in many of our homes where projects accumulate. They go there to die a slow death for lack of a solution, lack of time, or lack of resources. They remain there because there is still hope...hope that a fresh idea, or a block of time, or a burst of energy will resurrect the project and lead to its completion.

For some this place is a work room in the house. For others it is simply a desk in a room, or a closet in a hallway, or a work bench in the garage, or a table in the basement. I call it the Saturday room. It's the place to go when I want to tinker on some things. When the Saturday chores are done, and I have a little time to work on some projects that are of interest to me (and maybe only me), I go to the Saturday room.

My Saturday room is a corner of the garage.

One particular Saturday I had a project that moved to the top of my list. The garage door opener had stopped functioning properly and I had disconnected the opener from the garage door. We now simply opened it manually. I explained to my family that this is how people had opened their garage doors in the generations that preceded us. However, I was reminded that previous generations had also lived in caves and I think my family was about to club me into submission if I didn't get the door repaired expeditiously.

I know there are people who specialize in garage door repairs. And I know that the cost of a new garage door opener would not destroy our family budget, or keep our children out of college. However, this seemed like something I could fix; it was the perfect Saturday Room project. So, I began to disassemble the mechanism. With a ratchet and a screw driver as weapons, I attacked the garage door opener and had it dismantled from the garage ceiling in no time.

There is a room in my Mansion of Prayer called the Saturday Room. It is a place where problems go that I have not yet resolved. This is the place I put questions for which

my faith has provided inadequate answers. It is a place to mull over ideas, mourn over lack of resources and wrestle with issues. It is a safe place for spiritual tinkering...safe because the problems and questions usually stay contained within the confines of the work bench...usually.

When I got the garage door opener off the ceiling, I realized that it was too long to fit in the small spaces I had in the garage. I needed a little bit more open area, and it was too cold to work outside. So, I moved my project into the entryway and living room of our home. This area provided a nice stretch of tile where the track and chain of the door opener could be stretched out. I brought my tools indoors and began to dismantle the casing around the electric motor.

This problem was certainly bigger than my expertise, but some problems demand attention and never ask if you are prepared or equipped. They don't ask if you are ready, if you are trained, if you have a support network in place or if you have time. They just demand attention. And these types of problems aren't neatly relegated to the work bench. Rather, they spill over into other parts of life.

My project, that had gotten too big for the garage space was now creating havoc in the home. I wasn't able to fix it on that Saturday, so it stayed spread out in the entryway and living room for days. You had to step over it if you walked in the front door. You had to walk around it to get to the hallway. And the greasy black chain and gutted electric motor was an ugly contrast to the white tile and clean beige carpet. My little problem had certainly begun to contaminate other areas of my life, and that of my family.

Sometimes the Saturday projects become toxic to the rest of life. They seem to command a space where sleep is scarce and time moves in slow motion. They can create a feeling of being in a dark hole where light neither escapes nor enters.

One of the most intriguing features of the Christian scriptures is the absence of any written record for the Saturday between Jesus' burial after the crucifixion (Friday evening) and the empty tomb following the resurrection (Sunday morning). Is it possible that the writers could find no words to adequately describe what Saturday felt like? How does one try to communicate hopelessness? What word pictures do justice in describing profound grief, abject futility or exhausted surrender? It is a place where options are gone, where God is silent and where life smells like death.

For some, the toxic Saturday experience lasts more than a day. It can last a week, a month, a year or a lifetime. The Saturday prayer room is not an easy place to be. There are times when anger feels antithetical to spirituality, but in the Saturday room it is sometimes the *only* authentic expression. It is a place where the tears often outnumber the words. It is a place where we long for the aftershocks of the resurrection to finally bring Easter to our circumstances. And maybe that is the point of the Saturday room. In prayer, we can consider again that somehow Christ has overcome death, and ultimately we will experience life without the shadow of death always being present. The stench of the room changes when I consider, “He is risen.”