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You may be assured that the cause of revivals is far more likely to suffer an attempt on the part of its friends to pass off everything for gold, than by giving to that which is really dross its proper name.

—WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE

By 1854, a correspondent of the Independent could write jovially, "Brethren, if you will follow the above directions for two months, and do not enjoy a revival of religion of the old stamp, you may tell me and the public, I am no prophet." . . . If salvation was available for the asking, then a revival was a matter of getting the greatest possible number to ask—a matter of salesmanship. As theology grew simpler, technique became predominant.

—BERNARD WEISBERGER

GREEN BERETS FOR JESUS

Monte E. Wilson

It was late one evening when a friend came to my dorm room at Samford University. I had been practicing piano for hours and was just getting to my room for some dreaded work on a Western Civilization assignment. The friend excitedly told me of a revival at one of the Baptist churches there in Birmingham, Alabama. Apparently, he had "never seen or heard of anything like what was going on there." Being the son of a Southern Baptist pastor, I seriously doubted if there was anything I had not already seen or heard. However, since I was weary of being secluded in a windowless room for three hours of piano practice, I "felt led" to go to church that night.

We arrived forty-five minutes early and there were no more seats available in an auditorium that seated 750 or more people. Rather than standing outside with all the late-comers and listening to the service via loudspeakers, I led my friend around the back where we sneaked in through some closets, crawled through the choir loft and sat down on the floor directly in front of the pulpit.

After some rousing music, the janitor came out to do something with the pulpit. I knew he was the janitor because he had long hair, was wearing faded blue jeans, a pullover and sandals. To my surprise, however, the "janitor" turned out to be the speaker—Arthur Blessit, the "father" of the Jesus Movement. For forty-five minutes, Arthur exhorted the crowd of young people to give their

lives to Jesus Christ. The man's very pores exuded the love of Christ. I was mesmerized by his passion for the lost and his obvious devotion to reach those whom the church had ignored.

When the sermon was over, an invitation was given for people to come forward to give themselves to Jesus. Scores came down the aisle and emptied their pockets of drugs and related paraphernalia. While Arthur was working his way through the crowd, I could see that he was moving in my direction. As I tried to back up and give the pagans room to talk with the man, I could see that he was focused on reaching me. When he took my hand, before I could say—"I am a Baptist who hasn't missed Sunday School in fourteen years and my dad is a leading pastor in the denomination so don't confuse me with the riffraff"—he told me to sit in a pew and not leave until he had spoken with me. His tone was stern, his demeanor was commanding.

While I had the urge to run, I waited for Arthur to return. "No one talks to me in that tone. What happened to the love that was dripping from his every word? Why did he look so angry with me? Does he think I am one of those pagans?" Before I could let him know that he had made a mistake, he sat down beside me and told me that I was obviously running from God's call on my life. "What call is that?" I asked. "The call to the ministry," he shot back.

Now I had already explained to God a year before that I would serve Him, but not in any pulpit. I loved my dad; I thought he was an incredible man of God. However, the vocation seemed quite stressful, laden with poverty and filled with men who needed some lessons in *savoir faire*. Not a lifestyle I was attracted to. So, as a compromise with the Almighty, I offered my services in the world of music. Obviously, Arthur had not been made privy to this agreement. However, before I could explain my case to this misguided evangelist, he told me that we—as in, the two of

us—were going to go out and "witness to people for the Lord."

When we pulled up in front of the Boom-Boom Room, I knew I was in trouble. I had frequently patronized this establishment but had not "felt led" to speak to anyone there about his spiritual condition. While I had never been carded there before, this time I begged God to see to it that the gentleman at the door noticed I was under age. He did not.

While Arthur began cheerfully speaking to individuals about the gospel I did my best to disappear into the shadows and hoped that no one recognized me. But then I heard a man ask me if I was "with that long-haired guy over there." I nodded yes, eyes staring forward. He then asked me if I believed the same things that Arthur was telling people over at the bar. I affirmed my agreement with another nod, and still would not look at the gentleman who was speaking to me.

"Do you mean to tell me that Jesus will forgive me all of my sins, if I ask Him to?" His voice was filled with amazement.

"Yes," I answered, with a voice filled with a not-so-subtle tone that said, "Go Away, You Bother Me!"

"Do you mean that I could pray right here and give my life to Jesus Christ and He would wipe my sins away?" His voice was growing louder.

"Yes." My answers were more quiet than the still small voice heard by Elijah.

"I can repent . . . and He will forgive *anything* and *everything* I have done wrong?"

I sighed a "Yes" in his general direction.

"Okay. Let's pray. I want to give my life to Jesus!"

I couldn't believe it. I looked over at the elderly gentleman whose cheeks were bathed in tears and . . . drew a blank. What was I supposed to say? Finally I remembered

that I should lead him in prayer, and so offered my hand and bowed my head. With the gusto of a Pentecostal, the man yelled out, "No, I want to kneel like those people over there are doing with your friend!" And before I could explain that we were not saved by such works, he had yanked me to the floor to kneel beside him and began repenting of every sin he had ever committed, his anguish filling every syllable. Before I had time to cover myself by acting as if I had dropped my contact lenses, I was awash in tears of humiliation over my arrogance and fear of man. Here was an unbeliever who, without hesitation, was willing to humble himself before God and man while I, a long-time believer, refused to do anything that would take me out of my ego's comfort zone.

"DR. LIVINGSTONE, I PRESUME?"

For the next few weeks I wrestled with what I should do with my life. Music did not appear to be the vehicle that was going to take me where I wanted to go. And where was that? I didn't really know. All I knew was that I had to give my life to something bigger than myself, something transcendent, something that would demand every ounce of my being, every second of my existence.

One evening, while walking the aisles of the library at Samford, my eyes trained on the top shelf, I tripped over a stack of books lying on the floor. While restacking the books, my eyes focused on the name of a man whom I had read about years before. I picked up the book and began reading.

He was back in his native Scotland to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Glasgow. As he walks across the stage to receive the honor, the audience sees the great David Livingstone: a man gaunt and emaciated from years of living in Africa with hostile temperatures and people. He has suffered malaria well over twenty times.

One of his arms hangs useless by his side, having been mauled by a lion. And rather than clapping and yelling (or taunting, as the students usually did on such occasions), they stood and greeted him with the ovation of reverential silence.

He announced that he will soon return to the continent that had captured his soul years before. Knowing people wondered about the sanity of going back to such horrendous conditions, living nearly every day with the threat of death, he tells the students why he will go back with gladness. His confidence was based on a promise from God, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* "On those words I staked everything, and they never failed!"

*I wanted to take the gospel to wherever
spiritual darkness was the greatest.
Neighborhoods would suffocate me; only
the needs of nations would make me want
to get up in the morning!*



As I read this story, I knew that I was called to take the gospel of the kingdom to the world. Other people may wish to live out their lives in the same neighborhoods as they grew up in, with the same friends, eating at the same restaurants for the next fifty years, but this was not my destiny. I wanted to take the gospel to wherever spiritual darkness was the greatest. Neighborhoods would suffocate me; only the needs of nations would make me want to get up in the morning!

For the next several years, I preached in bus stations, bars, colleges, churches and on street corners. For close to eighteen months I spoke an average of five times a day on radio and television, before prayer groups and in "revival services." Thousands of young people confessed Christ as their Lord.

It was an amazing time. I could stand in a park in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, and within moments after I had begun speaking, hundreds of people gathered around to listen. When I exhorted young people to come with me after a church service was dismissed, scores of them followed me to the beach, to a park or to the racetrack where we shared the gospel with those who never dreamed of being approached on such a subject in such a place. The unbelievers were hungry, the believers were on fire.

But what happened when many of the older adults or even some of the young people had other things to do or did not "feel led" to follow me in my quest? Well, isn't it obvious? They were deadbeats with spiritual mononucleosis. They were lukewarm Christians whom God was going to puke out of His mouth, Pharisees upon whom He would send His judgment!

It was one thing for my fellow ministers and me to give away nearly all the money we earned, forgoing certain creature comforts, witnessing from city to city. We crossed the line, however, when we began to believe that all Christians should have the same experiences we had and share the gospel with the lost with the same intensity and frequency that we did. We went over the edge when we deemed ourselves more spiritual than those who refused to follow our lead.

THE SPIRITUAL ELITE

One of the driving forces behind pietistic evangelical fundamentalism is its desire to be on the cutting edge of

true spirituality. We will have none of that two-tiered Roman Catholic brand of Christianity where the priests are required to live holy lives on behalf of a people who get to be normal! No way! Every believer is a priest who is required to talk like an epistle and live like an apostle.

Do you go to church only on Sundays? You are clearly in need of some sort of Damascus Road experience. Have you failed to read all of Sproul's or Swindoll's or Tozer's books? Slacker! You don't pray for an hour every day and read your Bible through at least twice a year? And you really think you're saved?

For the average serious evangelical, a church is not really a church unless it is filled with *Green Berets for Jesus*. We hold to the notion that the true church is the home of the Spirit-filled elite and the apostolic meat-eaters. And if not? Look out. Ministers will be brought into such *ordinary* congregations to exhort the people to be like a missionary society or a para-church organization. How can they prove their commitment? They must give more than a tithe. They must daily get up at 5 a.m. and pray for an hour. They must evangelize every unbeliever in their office before the next service where they will be expected to give their testimony of success. They must dress like Ozzie and Harriet, talk like Charlton Heston doing Moses, and eat like St. Francis of Assisi.

In the early days of the church, one of the major battles to be waged was against the infiltration of Gnosticism. Usually, these people believed that the truly spiritual were those who had received special knowledge, special revelation. Gnostics did not believe that created matter (e.g., the flesh, the earth, time) could ever attain to something like holiness. Matter was evil, spirit was holy. People who lived normal lives—who did things like get married, have children, work with their hands—were worse than dogs. Only those who sought to escape this world of matter and ordinariness to the perfect world from where they originated were holy.

So what happened when those who wished to be uncommon came into contact with the blacksmith who claimed to have been born-again—and remained a common blacksmith with a common wife and common children, who lived common lives and died commonly? “This cannot be! How can this laborer claim to have had the same spiritual experience that we have enjoyed?” This would not do. If the masses could accept the faith, then something more must be required. There had to be a higher plane, a deeper life: one where the meat-eater would not have to rub shoulders with milk-drinkers.

It was simply not acceptable to these Gnostic elite to be lumped together with such earthy people. What was the solution to their dilemma? Create another tier of spirituality—The Deeper Life Club, which alone could claim to be the truly, authentic, spiritual, holy, New Testament church!

THERE IS THEREFORE . . . CONDEMNATION

What happens when a local church is captured by the notion that all of its members are to live like David Livingstone? Is it enough that this church faithfully partakes of the Lord’s Supper, baptizes, sits under the Word of God every Sunday, visits the sick and shut in, leavening the area where God placed it? No, it is not. Every member must be like Livingstone, or Blessit, or Graham, or Müller.

We not only evaluate our churches by the inapplicable standard of one man’s calling, but we also evaluate them by the standard of the “renewal movement.” We started out in youth rallies, moved to charismatic conferences, and then on to seminars about reforming the church and nation. We are *Movement* oriented.

Renewal movements are exciting, fresh, intense. But this is not the normal Christian life. So when my particular church ceases being “on the cutting edge” of whatever it is God-is-doing-in-the-earth, I take off looking for the next

“wave,” the next movement, the next spiritual rush. I want to ride the waves, not build the church.

We not only evaluate our churches by the inapplicable standard of one man’s calling, but we also evaluate them by the standard of the “renewal movement.”



I believe that a vast majority of evangelicals are addicted to the psychological highs which come with the new renewal movement: the new churches it produces, the new paradigm, the new practices, etc. There is absolutely no commitment to the church as the church because it is the church. No. We see our local church as a movement which has ceased moving us—so it is time to move on.

Green Beret Christians evaluate themselves and their churches by the standard of a renewal movement or revival. If they are not experiencing the conscious presence of God, something is wrong with them or the church: I am in sin, they are in sin, someone is in sin! If there are not times of intense focus upon religious things, they are “being distracted by the world.” If they are not learning new music every Sunday, “God has departed.” If souls are not being converted at a good pace, “We have no heart for the lost.” What do they do? They go start another franchise of The Church of What’s Happenin’ Now, or The Church Which Is Doing It Right.

What happens to the normal Christian when living a normal life *as a Christian* is thought to be far less than what

God requires? They have only two options. They can (a) fake it, secretly living with the condemnation of their commonness, or (b) leave the church altogether. Of course, there are a few brave, mature souls who refuse to bow to the extra-scriptural demands of the elite and patiently wait for us all to run out of steam.

Given this mindset, are we surprised to learn of the havoc we have brought into the church? Can we see that when we demanded a church of pure spirituality that we embarked on a road inevitably leading to schismatic behavior? When we withdrew our loyalty from churches because they were filled with tares, were we not requiring more than God Himself requires this side of eternity? What would happen if we judged our own souls with the same perfectionistic standard we hung like the Sword of Damocles over our local churches?

Can we see the damage caused by our pride and ignorance? Meat-eaters shunning milk-drinkers; the spiritual elite leaving the "carnal" church to start their own "First Church of the Green Berets"—a church where one's spirituality (to place the best possible light on it) is judged by the standard of one particular calling and gifting rather than his saltiness in day-to-day living. Will there be growth in grace in this sort of atmosphere?

GREEN BERETS VS. THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

Consider what the apostles demanded of the newly converted Gentiles. At the end of the debate considering what requirements to place on the incoming Gentile believers, the apostles decided to lay no burden on these people other than to require that they abstain from things offered to idols, from blood and from things strangled, and from sexual immorality (Acts 15). Watch your testimony, watch your diet, watch your morals. That's it.

Can you imagine if one of us had been there? "Now,

Jim, my boy, this won't do. These folks need to be called up to a higher place in God. You apostles go up to the temple every day to pray, and so should these Gentiles. You own only one coat, one pair of sandals, give most all of your money to the poor, and every time I turn around you are fasting. Why not require the same thing of all these new believers? At least let them know that there is a deeper life to which they can attain through a more spiritually rigorous lifestyle . . . that is, if they can attain the same level of revelation that we have."

Of course, one of the greatest attributes of many modern Green Beret Christians is living as if Jesus were coming back today. Being a disciple of Hal Lindsey, I knew this was it. We had only a few years left.



Or what of Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians regarding walking in love with their fellow believers? They were to lead a quiet life, mind their own business and work with their hands (1 Thess. 4:11). Isn't this the route to true spirituality within a community? Shouldn't Paul have added that they needed to have special Sunday evening services for the lost, Wednesday night prayer meetings, Thursday night deacons meetings, Friday night home group meetings and Saturday visitation? How in the world did Paul expect these people to grow in love if they weren't constantly in church together?

Of course, one of the greatest attributes of many mod-

ern Green Beret Christians is living as if Jesus were coming back today. Being a disciple of Hal Lindsey, I knew this was it. We had only a few years left. (This was 26 years ago.) Why, pray tell, should we give ourselves to such mundane matters as developing a career, raising a family, seeing our children get married, building an inheritance to leave our grandchildren and getting involved in matters that concerned the welfare of the cities we lived in? What were these lukewarm Christians thinking about when they so easily tripped off to work or bought a new car or put money in savings or ran for a political office? Had they no sense of the times in which we were living? Obviously they must be in need of a revival or the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Or maybe they are not even saved!

I remember one day reading where Jeremiah told the people of Israel who were captive in Babylon to get a life. While the false prophets were running around telling the Israelites they were about to escape from their captivity, Jeremiah said, "Go build houses and live in them, plant gardens and enjoy their fruit, build families so you can multiply in number, and seek the welfare of the city where God has caused you to be carried away captive" (Jer. 29:4-9). Are these words of wisdom for a people who are to come-out-from-among-them-and-be-separate? Certainly we can't take this tack, *can we*? This passage was the beginning of the end of my running around the country telling people they had better live like those who were not long for this world. The burning question became, "What if we are still here one hundred years from now?" What sort of world have we left our great-grandchildren? What sort of churches will we leave the generations who follow? Have we left a business to expand, or debts to pay off? Have we left a good foundation for our children to build upon, or will they have to live their lives clearing away the rubble of debris left through our disinterest?

REPELLED OR ATTRACTED?

One day at St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, I was sharing the gospel with a young man. He had struck up a conversation about something he had seen on television, and the conversation had turned to spiritual matters. In the twinkling of an eye a bus filled with overzealous young people pulled up and disgorged the occupants. Before you could say, *Just-as-I-am-without-one-plea*, they had passed out gospel tracts to about a hundred shocked people and were back on the bus pulling out of the parking lot. As they drove off into the sunset, they hung out the windows yelling at everyone, "Jesus is Lord!"

What made those kids (and us) think that unbelievers will be attracted to the gospel by strange behavior? Why did we think that someone who is biblically illiterate will respond positively to the question, "Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?" Do we actually think someone will be motivated to seek salvation because he read a sign taped on the side of a car that reads "John 3:16"? Do people run to their prayer closets when they read a bumper sticker that says "God Is My Provider" on the back of a rusted out 1988 Buick?

To help us ascertain our ideas of true "spirituality," consider two ministers. One man fasts quite often; in fact, he borders on being an ascetic. He preaches to everyone he knows, and is constantly challenging them to repent of their sins or to expect hell. He rarely passes up an opportunity to expose the immorality of the state's political leaders, and he never passes up the chance to expose the hypocrisy of church leaders. He is a "Type A" sort of guy who lives an in-your-face religion. His testimony is one of a "prophet" who burns with holiness.

The other man frequents parties and loves socializing with unbelievers. At these parties he frequently refrains from confronting a single soul with the message of the gospel.

Other than one protracted fast in the beginning of his ministry, he seldom practices that spiritual discipline. He doesn't preach often and when he does talk of spiritual matters he tells stories about everyday life. Unlike the first minister, his testimony is a bit muddy. There are questions about the propriety of his having women travel with his ministry team, and the word is that he may like wine a bit too much.

Question: Given our ideas of spirituality, which of these men is more spiritual? Is it John the Baptist or Jesus? Why is that we believe John the Baptist's lifestyle is the one God expects of us all? Both were obeying God, both fulfilled their calling.

How did Christians in the first century influence their communities? When the Romans threw their unwanted newborn babies under the bridges, leaving the infants to be carried away by wild dogs, the Christians waited in the shadows, took the children home and raised them as their own.



In the early days of the church, when one could be imprisoned and executed for confessing Christ alone as Lord, how did the Christian community "let their light shine"? Did they engage in door-to-door evangelism? Did they hold open-air crusades? How did the average Christian become "salt and light"? Did you know that their

church meetings were closed, private affairs?

How did Christians in the first century influence their communities? When the Romans threw their unwanted newborn babies under the bridges, leaving the infants to be carried away by wild dogs, the Christians waited in the shadows, took the children home and raised them as their own. This testimony, over a period of time, won the hearts of many.

What else did they do? They lived peaceable and self-governed lives. When conflicts arose that could not be resolved, the aggrieved parties went to the elders, the church court (1 Cor.). These courts were renown for providing justice. You can imagine how attractive this would be to a society that was utterly corrupt. Gradually, many of the Romans began appealing to these courts for adjudication of their conflicts.

What did these people do to disciple their nation for Christ? They acted justly, they loved mercy and they walked humbly before God (Micah 6:8). *They lived their day-to-day lives as Christians.* They married, had children, went about fulfilling their vocations, went to church and watched for opportunities to do good to others. No big marches, no boycotts of grocery stores who sold meat to be offered to idols, no Christian entertainment at the Colosseum. Political offices were not an option.

I am not suggesting that organized evangelism is wrong. I am not saying that a John-the-Baptist style of confrontational or sacrificial living is wrong. I am saying that not everyone is called or gifted for such things. I am also saying that for the vast majority of Christians, what God expects of us is to live our normal lives as Christians.

SALT, LIGHT, LEAVEN

Given our proclivity to define Christianity in terms of the stupendous and cataclysmic—miraculous deliverances,

Damascus Road conversions, Great Awakenings—we are uncomfortable with metaphors that speak of imperceptible growth and gradual advance. However, these *are* the metaphors given to us.

Green Beret Christians often prefer the quick fix to painful surgery and longterm recovery. They hate the notion of patient plodding. In fact, given their addiction to the intense feelings produced within the renewal movement, they refuse to accept any so-called wisdom that plans in terms of organic, seasonal growth. The only metaphors they find acceptable are military ones. But even with this metaphor, we must remember that not everyone is called to be in the Special Forces.

God has called all of us to be salt, light and leaven.

To be *salty* is to have godly character, to be a faithful person. Salty people display covenantal love and loyalty to God and to others. By letting our *light shine* we display His grace by our good works so that the world will see and glorify the Father. *As leaven*, we seek to obey God in every area of life. We are good seed planted in the soil of our neighborhoods, cities and nation.

Neither my specific calling and gifting, nor yours, are the standard for all Christians to aspire. Even if some are Green Berets, they make up only a very small portion of God's Army. Let us all run the course set before us and try not to run someone else's race or require that everyone compete on our track.

YOU MAY BE A ROGUE GREEN BERET IF . . .

You are obsessed with The Cause more than with Christ.

You judge churches and fellow believers by the standard of your Cause.

You are driven rather than inspired.

You rarely leave the battlefield, and, when you do, you

never take off your uniform.
 You define yourself solely in terms of your Cause.
 Your house is a boot camp rather than a home.
 You go through friendships like a nicotine fiend goes through a pack of cigarettes.
 You define "enemy" as all who disagree with you.
 You judge other Christians by the intensity of their personalities rather than by the godliness of their character.
 You have more commandments than God does.
 You feel it your mission in life to rid the church of tares.
 You believe that Sabbaths are for wimps.
 You believe that those who indulge in hobbies are failing to "redeem the time."
 Your motto is, "It all depends on me."
 You believe that stoicism is a godly attribute.
 You always describe the faith in terms of military metaphors and similes.
 You cannot laugh at yourself.
 You cannot sit alone quietly in a room and do nothing.
 You secretly admire the Inquisition's treatment of "heretics."
 You think General Patton would have made a great pastor.

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