

THREE VACATION LESSONS

Dr. George O. Wood

This morning I'm doing something that I very rarely do and that is preach a sermon from experience. I realize there are great dangers of preaching from experience. That's why I don't do it very much because it's so easy to get off the plumbline of scripture. If you're a visitor today and experience oriented preaching is not for you, give us a couple of Sundays. Don't judge us on the basis of this Sunday.

But I learned some things during vacation that I thought were so personally applicable to me that I wanted to share them with you. So many people have asked me, How did your vacation go, and I want to be able to say something to them in a theological kind of way how it went.

I think there may be some justification from preaching from experience periodically. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:7 "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example." I asked myself kind of rhetorically the question, how can you follow my example if I don't share my life with you? So I'm going to take a stab at sharing some of my vacation with you.

Three vacation lessons. One I call hidden fears and buried mysteries. Do you ever behave in a manner that you cannot explain? Reflect on that for a moment. I found that I evidently had some hidden fears and buried mysteries. I started behaving in a way that I could not explain.

The behavior was associated with our automobile. On the second day of our vacation in the afternoon we were trying to get to Carlsbad Caverns before they closed. We started climbing Guadeloupe Pass in New Mexico. I understand that it's the highest pass in New Mexico to climb.

As we kept going up the mountain the car kept going slower and slower. Which meant we were falling further and further behind schedule. I just figured it had something to do with the diesel engine maybe couldn't take the road. I had just had it around town not on the road. By the time we got to the top we were laboring along at five miles an hour. During that hour long slow climb or however long it was I noticed I was becoming tensed up, literally frozen with tension and fear. I would almost explode at the slightest suggestion from any member of the family on what I should be doing with the car at that particular moment. I thought why all of a sudden, this normal, cool, calm, collected person that you see in a three piece suit on a Sunday and looks like he has it all together, but is totally coming apart inside this is that is coming apart

We finally made it a little bit late to Carlsbad Caverns but we got to see some of it. We came back out, the car started perfectly, acted normally. We got to the next town, got up the next day, drove it all the way to Dallas and it worked fine. Skipped a little now and then on hills but I figured that it just has trouble on hills.

On the way to Houston, Texas it began to go slow on level roads. We were coming into Houston, Texas on Saturday afternoon, pattering along at about twenty miles an hour on the interstate. I was frozen with fear that the car was going to die at any time. In the words of Job to borrow a phrase from him, when I think about this I am terrified, trembling seizes my body. That exactly describes it. There's nothing in the world going to happen to us in Houston, Texas

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on Saturday afternoon but I was sure the world was ending. Irritable beyond belief. My wife couldn't figure out what in the world was happening to me.

We found out there wasn't anybody available to work on the car till Monday. We roamed aimlessly in a shopping center for a couple hours not certain what to do. We finally got back in the car, started up and it acted perfect. So we got on the road and kept driving. About midnight it started having problems again so we pulled over and stopped. We wanted to make it into Mobile, Alabama the next day to go to church where we were married.

We made it to church ten minutes before they dismissed. I knew that the car had to get fixed in Mobile. I got it into a service station. They worked faithfully on it, repaired some things they thought were wrong, charged me \$220. Got it out of town that afternoon a one-hour later did the same thing all over again only worse. My irritability and tension and fright began to increase again as I had it on the road. It developed the syndrome of going for a quarter of mile and needing to rest fifteen minutes before going the next quarter mile. It took us about six hours to go ten miles. Finally I gave up and got it towed into Mobile.

We found out it was a little filter in the gas tank that was causing it. But I said to myself, something is causing this. My reaction to this whole situation should not be so severe. Like I think I'm an orphan that's going to wind up in the middle of nowhere lost and nobody's ever going to help me out. And whenever I stop they're going to take the rest of my money, foreclose my house and we'll all be wiped out. Why am I so irrational and touchy? And I'm afraid to travel at night why is all of this on me? I said Lord give me some illumination.

Immediately an experience came to me from childhood. Along about the age of twelve my family was in the process of transferring out of churches and dad was giving consideration of starting a new church. We had gone to Jeffersonville, Indiana to explore starting a new church. I was the last remaining kid at home. That day the parent had looked over the possibilities of starting this church. At night they'd gotten in the car to drive to Indianapolis to maybe survey that as a prospect. On the way, and we were very low of funds, my dad got deathly sick. And every three or four miles he was stopping the car to heave. I was supposedly lying down in the back seat asleep. I remember him saying to mother, I don't think I'm going to make it. I think I'm going to die. For me out in the middle of that Indiana night, the dark skies and no future, it just seemed to me like the end of the world.

They were so low of funds but they wanted to find a motel. I think you could stay for around four dollars in those days. But it seemed like every motel they went to it was six dollars or above so they keep driving past those until they got a four-dollar motel.

I suppose I never quite got over the fear and terror of that evening. And that's why to this day I've been afraid to drive in the evening for fear maybe of a breakdown. When car trouble started up I was beside myself.

So I had to begin to pray, Lord, deliver me from my hidden fears. Have you ever behaved in any area in an irrational way? When you are criticized do you for inexplicable reasons fall apart? Some people do that in response to criticism and never know why they can't take criticism.

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Or is it that you have assets that you literally hoard. You're afraid someone's going to take your assets for you. It may be money, which you needlessly hoard. It may be things. And you don't know why it is that you have this compulsion to gather it around you and not let it go.

Is there a layer of encasing reserve around your life, around your inner self? Maybe around your inner self in your marriage and you're afraid to come through and let your real self show. Maybe it's because somewhere your parent or someone very close to you had a marriage fail and you're afraid of failing.

Do random suicidal thoughts strike you? You wonder, this isn't like me. This isn't rational and normal like I am. Why is this that I am bothered with this? You think back and perhaps someone close to you has committed suicide.

Are you a student getting ready to go into college and the thought of college classes absolutely panics you? Yet you're a good student. You've been a good student in high school. Yet you have this irrational fear of failure. If you take my classes, it is a *rational* fear.

Do you at times demonstrate behavior around the house with your wife and your children or your family that is quite different from what you really are?

David cried out, "Search me O God and know my heart." I might add to that, Deliver me O God from my hidden fears and buried mysteries.

I realized that that might be the source of my fear I sort of calmed down the rest of the trip. We made it to our General Council of the Assemblies of God in St. Louis and were on the way back from General Council heading back home. A two thousand-mile trip. Two hours out of St Louis the car in the passing lane cuts out and I'm coasting. But instantly a feeling of peace came over me, totally unlike the previous experience I'd had. I looked around and there was nobody coming in the right lane so I coasted over. Pulled the car to a stop. I just said to my wife, I just feel the Lord's going to work this out. I have a real good sense about it.

All of a sudden a policeman comes along, calls a tow truck. A mechanic would be able to work on it. Two cars come along returning from General Council, friends of mine. They saw me by the road. They stopped and offered help.

Another patrolman comes along and the first one leaves. I got to talking with him and found out he had a son at Christ for the Nations Institute where I had taught. He's a fellow Christian. He gave us a ride into the garage while the tow truck takes our car.

We get to the garage and I remember: St Robert, Missouri near Fort Leonard Wood. My dad pastored there once when I was in college. I wonder where the church is. I also was afraid of getting stuck on the road and having some garage really take me to the cleaners. I thought I'm going to do something I rarely do – throw my ministerial credentials around. I'm going to tell them I'm a minister. Usually ministers do that to get a discount. That's why I don't like to do it. It's sort of fawning on people. But I said maybe it's my protection here.

I told the man, My dad used to pastor in this town and I'm a minister myself. He said, Really? What church did your dad pastor? In a few minutes the owner comes out. He introduces himself. Says he and his brother own the place. He said, I understand you're an Assemblies of God

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minister. My parents used to be Assemblies of God preachers. Right away I knew I wasn't going to get taken.

We got to talking a while longer. I told him where I was from in Southern California. He said, "You wouldn't by any chance know..." and I said, Yes I do. They were members of my church. They pastor now. He said they were his first cousins.

We talked a little while about the family. I said, by the way, where is the Assembly of God church in this town. He said, It's right next door. We walked next door. I met the pastor who happened to be the pastor who preceded my dad and had now since come back to the church.

I ask you, where between St. Louis and Los Angeles would you care to break down? One mile from St Robert. I broke down in the ideal place.

We got home and unpacked the car. We were a little bit hungry and decided to go out and get a bite to eat. We were headed for CoCo's and had gone about 4 or 5 miles from home and stopped at a red light. My wife said isn't the car idling a little rough? I said I think it is. Then all of a sudden bang! Bang! Bang! Like someone taking a steal hammer on the inside of the motor. It had thrown a rod through the crankcase. But it waited until I got home. It didn't do it in Arizona or Barstow. But it waited until I got home.

It was just like the Lord through all of these things pouring oil over these hidden fears and buried mysteries of the past. Saying, once you give it to me and learn to commit it you can be at perfect peace on it.

Maybe the situation will reoccur but your reaction to it will be wholly different than it was before. That's maybe what I'm saying to you today. That if there are some thing that cause you to act in a way you don't understand, ask the Lord to help begin to give you understanding on why it is you're responding that way. So that you need not even in the same situation have the same kind of response as you've had before. Hidden fears and buried mysteries.

The second lesson I think that I've learned spiritually on vacation I'll call Find the Open Door.

It comes out of the scripture reference of Paul's second missionary journey, which has always intrigued me. He really started out that missionary journey not having his final goal in sight. I always like to have a final goal in sight. But he really didn't know but he kept on going even when he didn't know. He took one step after another. He never stopped and just become passive and said I'm not moving until the Lord opens up heaven and tells me what I'm supposed to do. But he kept going until he couldn't go anymore and then the Lord told him what to do. He kept finding the open door.

As I began to realize I was closing out my 39th year of life – my fourth decade was ending – that there were areas in my life where I was stuck on a plateau in my Christian experience and even some areas where I had the record of consistent failure. One of my lifelong problems has been the desire to change everything at once. I am a perfectionist at heart. I've always had perfectionist tendencies.

I remember when I was in high school, 16 years of age and I got into an argument with a fellow Christian on the perfectibility of the Christian life. The thesis being can a Christian live a perfect

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life. My position was yes he can because scripture says, Be holy as I am holy. Or be perfect as I am perfect. I said if the Lord said it he meant it, therefore it can be done. I wrote a seven-page paper on the perfectibility of the Christian life – typed single space. No grade, it wasn't done for a class. I just did it because I believe in perfection.

But as you get older a lot of things begin to develop in your life that aren't perfect. I happen to run across a weight scale while I was on vacation and shouldn't have stepped on it. When I did to my absolute shock I found out I had ballooned up to 195 pounds. I've never weighed that much in my life. Thirty pounds overweight.

Vacation is especially difficult time to cut back. And General Council where you meet all your friends in the ministry and go out for desert is the worst time. Besides, I've always loved rolls and pastries and deserts, fried potatoes, chocolate doughnuts. A member of the congregation gave me forty chocolate doughnuts for my birthday.

I've never been on a diet in my life, never believed in them. And I don't like fruit, vegetables, fish and tuna. So you see, I've got real problems. I thought I've got to change. How can I change? I'm powerless. Put an apple pie in front of me, al la mode, and I'm powerless.

But one thing gave me the courage to change. It happened this spring quite accidentally when I managed to surface that I was having a problem with being addicted to coffee. Not that I'm against people drinking coffee because I'm not. But in my case it had become a real problem. Since I confessed myself into that accidentally in the pulpit I felt obligated that I needed to change.

So wonder of wonders, I was able to kick coffee. Probably one of the hardest things I've ever done. I thought if I was able to do that surely I can do something with food as well. I suppose if you want to make sweeping changes in your life the idea, and I've always had this idea that whenever it comes time to make changes you come to the altar, you dedicate yourself to the Lord and you change everything all at once. That's what I've always tried to do. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it doesn't.

I began to realize, here I am 40 years of age, the first time in my life I began to realize that it might be possible to change sequentially if you can't change everything simultaneously. You might be able to work on one thing at a time and get the confidence when you conquer that and move to the next. I've got about ten things in my life that needed to be taken care of. I wasn't having luck changing them simultaneously so maybe I ought to start sequentially.

I don't know where your area of finding the open door. Dropping coffee was kind of the open door for me. That may not be in for you at all. It may be a matter of diet or exercise or rest or order. For students here it might be cleanliness and keeping your room. That may be the open door. It may be in the matter of habits. Perhaps you have habits in you life, which need to be changed. Maybe in areas of the spirit. Perhaps you've kind of plateaued and you've ever gone into Christian retirement. A lot of people have gone into Christian retirement. There are really only two ways of keep growing spiritually and that is to take in and to give out. There are plenty of areas as you can see from the bulletin this morning of giving out. It's a matter of what the Lord puts on your heart to do. What can you do?

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Wonder of wonders occurred. I decided if I could kick food during General Council I could kick it anytime in my life because that every two years, that gorge week. The Lord gave me strength to do it.

I can't believe I'm saying this. Before vacation it would be the hardest thing for my ability to say I am now actually preferring in the morning for breakfast a half of a grapefruit and dry toast to chocolate doughnut and coffee. I even find myself occasionally looking forward to eating a fruit salad as a whole meal. Rather than a cheeseburger, French fries and apple pie al la mode.

Now this area of growing strength in my life has given me courage to tackle some other things.

All I'm saying to you is if you're stuck, find an open door somewhere and work on one thing and let the Lord give you help and strength on it and go for the next. When I get back to expositional preaching I may come out with a different conclusion. Expedience must always be governed by the scripture but I think I'm right.

Third, trust in God again. That's the third thing I learned in vacation. Trust in God again. Sometimes you get a better view of something when you get away. When I got away I looked again at the enormity of what we're trying to do in the building program. And the enormity of financial decisions we're making now. I thought of the great Sunday, August 2nd, we presented the nine miracles that needed to take place during our building program to be able to build a debt free. It just looked to me like the further I got from this the bigger that mountain was. There was a moment or two on vacation where I just absolutely panicked on the inside saying how can it be done? Are we getting in over our heads?

One night of the whole vacation I had somewhat of a sleepless night over this. During that time the Lord made real to me the scripture from Mark 6:45-52, the second storm at sea. The reason why that miracle because so significant to me about ten years ago the Lord made real to me the first storm at sea. We were going through a time in the church where it looked like everything was sinking faster than you could plug the holes in the boat. At that time the Lord made very real to my heart, quickened the word, about in the middle of the storm Jesus says, "Why are you afraid. Have you no faith?" Instantly, it was like the word of God under girded me and gave the confidence that he was in control of that situation.

But we like the disciples, go through more than one storm. Our storms are different from the last. Often they're more severe than the previous storm. I thought of this second storm at sea. It had been preceded by the fact that the disciples had been out on a training mission. They'd gone two by two to the villages of Galilee. Anybody who doesn't have a regular home to stay in at night and has to depend on other people, it's wearing physically. Ministering and the like. When they come back, Jesus says we're going to go apart to a place to rest. Only five thousand men plus women and children show up and follow them. So they don't get rest. What they get to do is be waiters all day long for the crowd. When it's all over they get the job of cleaning up and locking the doors if you will.

When it's all said and done Jesus says get in the boat. It's time to go to the other side. And he stays behind and they get in the boat. And they get in trouble right away. It takes about an hour to cross lake Galilee. They get in the boat around 7:00 in the evening and Jesus doesn't start walking across the water until the fourth watch of the night which is between four and six in the morning. They've been at it eight hours on top of everything else they'd been through.

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Isn't that striking? In the first storm Jesus responded immediately. They woke him up and he went to work. This time they're out there hour after hour after and nothing's happening. It seems to me the Lord made real to my heart that I would be somewhat like the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. But in his time Jesus would come walking by. Then that strange phrase in the gospel "He meant to pass them by." What's Jesus doing passing by the disciples? My own personal belief is that the thing that got him to stop was when Peter had the courage to get up and volunteer to walk.

Maybe it is that sometimes in our storms God waits on us to get up out of our boat and call upon the presence of the Lord. We're in God's will I'm convinced of that. Our motives are right. And the Lord is going to come through. If every once in a while over the next year I stand up in the boat and rock it and cry out at the top of my voice, you know I'm just frightened for a moment. But if I do that and if you do it with me, let's all be convinced right at the outset that Jesus is not going to pass us by.

Do you need to trust in God again? Are you in a situation that appears to be a rerun of something you've been through before, only this time it's worse than ever? Anybody here qualify for that? It's ok to cry out. When you have done all you could do Jesus is passing this way and he is not going to let you go down. He's not going to let his work go down.

This has been a valuable vacation because it showed me that I had some hidden fears and buried mysteries. That I need again to find an open door. And that I needed to trust in God again. I hope that you've been able to apply some of this to your own life. That it will be a valuable thing for you by looking through the window of my experience to review your own life. And to say with God's help I too can change.

Father, we're thankful for your word and we're also thankful for the Spirit that makes your word living to us. I am thankful for these things which your Spirit has taught me during these weeks I have been away. I pray now Lord for persons in this room. Some who are here today do have hidden fears and buried mysteries. Listening to me today they have been quietly taking inventory of their own life and realizing that in some areas they behave in a way that is not normal, not typical, not rational. You're saying to them in this gentle moment what about that. You're saying to them, Will you let me into that room of your irrationality? And turn on the light and show you why you are that way? And give you the power to be healed of that so you need not fear again? Lord, heal our hidden fears. Unveil our buried mysteries that we might in you be complete lacking nothing. Others here, Lord, need to find an open door. Their life sort of goes along without significant change for a period of time in spite of even consecration, walking forward, raising a hand. You're simply shared with them today through this word that there is an opportunity, an alternate going in sequential change. Give them, Lord, a feeling in their heart, a gift of special faith that helps each one of us realize what area is next and where you are calling us to go from victory unto victory. Lead us out of inactivity and bondage to the freedom and liberty of the children of God who can with Saint Paul say "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Then Lord let us trust in you again. There are college students here today who do not see at this moment how in the world they can afford this year. I pray, Lord, that you'll enlarge their faith. Cause them to know that you who called them also have the strength and the resources to complete and perfect the call. There are others here, Lord, who look at their

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checkbook and there's nothing there and look at the rent coming due and the bills that need to be paid and even gaucheries that need to be bought. And they're having great struggles. Lord, help them to trust you again. May they too take the courage to share with some of us so we can be of help as well.

Lord, there may be persons here who have been possessed of a dream. You've given them something to do and you've put it in their hearts to do it. It may be that right at this moment it seems like that dream is a dead end trail. It's become a cul d sac for them. And you're calling that person this day to trust you again, to drop the net on the other side of the boat, to believe you in the second storm, that you are there intervening and to bless and to establish what you have already in faith created. Grant, O Lord, that those dreams which are of you shall be brought to pass and fruit shall grow up yielding thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.