

Upgrading Our Image of God

By Graham Cooke

Whenever we move into a new spiritual dimension of our calling and our ministry, we must take the time to upgrade our relationship with God. Our calling comes at different levels at different times; it is a progressive journey of discovery. When God takes us into the next phase of our calling, our relationship with Him must also change.

Throughout our lives, we will enter into many different phases and experiences. It might be a marriage or the birth of a child, a significant work promotion, a new responsibility, a new ministry, or any other type of change. In seasons like that, we must take the time to upgrade our peace and rest in the Lord. If we enter a new situation without fully immersing ourselves in the stillness of God, we will live on our adrenaline and not out of our spirit. This power boost may seem sufficient at the moment, but for every adrenaline high, there is also an adrenaline low. We cannot sustain that needed adrenaline rush over the long term. Eventually our energy will wither away and the new season will overwhelm us. We must learn to live in a place of rest in the spirit.

Every experience of God, even resting in Him, should enable us to see Him in a different light. Therefore, we need to constantly re-evaluate our relationship with Him and take a deeper look at our walk with Him. We must critically examine our current picture of God and determine whether it is strong enough for the next life stage of our life and call. If it's not, the stress that we will experience will put pressure on us to quit or scale down our involvement in the new seasons of our lives. That same battle fatigue causes us to shrink back from the challenges facing us. Exhausted, we will talk ourselves out of taking the risks necessary to advance the Kingdom of God. God has given us the ability to live under his wing—we must recognize that we exist within the safety of His love and grace, and not on our own.



I cannot emphasize this enough—every time we are led into a new phase of our journey, we must take time to upgrade our image of God. We can travel confidently into any new experience, no matter how challenging or difficult, in our relationship with Him. God wants to build up your confidence right now, taking it to a whole new dimension.

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When we enter a new season it is important to ask ourselves relevant questions regarding its likely impact on all of our relationships and current responsibilities. Present levels of stress will need to be adjusted in the light of a deeper peace and rest that will be required on the next leg of the journey.

Change is much better if it is gradual over time rather than a large, overwhelming transformation requiring immediate extensive attention. The two questions required of us in a consistent basis are found in Acts 2, verses 12 and 37:

What does this mean?

What must we do?

How will these adjustments affect our relationship with God and one another? How will this new season deepen my love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit?



We need to gain a fresh and more powerful image of the nature of God. We need to practice our peace and our patience so that we can break through, in harmony with others, into a new dimension of the Spirit.

God has not called us to do what seems possible, reasonable or normally attainable; He has called us to do the impossible. He wants us to stretch beyond our ability, our faith, and our capacity to reason. He wants us to do more than we could ever imagine or dream. If you are reading this and think that your call is attainable, it's time for an upgrade. Christians are not supposed to be doing what is possible. We're supposed to be doing what is impossible and outrageous. To accomplish our calling, we must put our hand in the hand of God, learning to be completely dependent on the Holy Spirit for everything.

We have not truly learned to be dependent on the Holy Spirit in every facet of our lives—we continually try to make our own way. One of the common charismatic prayers I have come to dislike is "Holy Spirit, come." For me, the prayer is not "Holy Spirit, come," but "Lord, take not your Holy Spirit from me." The Holy Spirit is ever-present, so our whole approach should be to create a life where He is free to work. "Do what You want to do and let us know what that is," must become our prayer. In our relationship with God, we must not do anything that will upset our delicate balance with Him. Our task is to preserve our relationship with Him, not have to seek one because we have not walked with Him properly.

**"You are My
friends if you
do whatever I
command you..."**

John 15:14

When the Lord tells us to seek Him, it is for one of two reasons. Firstly, because we are backslidden or have become indolent in our walk and must recover the ground of our relationship with Him. Secondly, it is because we are coming into a new season and must take the time to develop a deeper expression of God in our hearts. In this context, He seeks us to first establish His desire in us. Our job is to make Him welcome and do the things which keep the Holy Spirit with us.

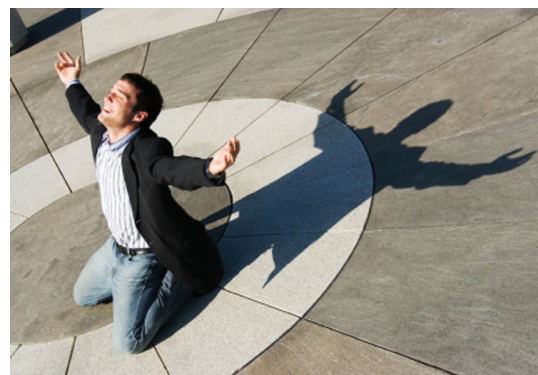
That balance hinges on our obedience, *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you,"* Jesus said in John 15:14.

A relationship with God depends on our obedience to Him. If we heed His commands, we will abide in His love. Obedience is a key to the presence of God—learning to simply rest and stay in God is a spiritual discipline.

Many of us are coming into a new thing right now, with a new call or new responsibilities or a new role. What does it mean for you this year? What does it mean for your relationship with God?

In this upgrade, God wants to declare something else to you about Himself. You see, God always wants to be something significant for us. The question shouldn't be, "Why is this happening to me?" The "why" question is never answered on earth. It is the wrong question. It should be "What is it that God wants to be for me now that He couldn't be at any other time, in any other way?" What is it about your current situation that is designed to bring you into a deeper relationship with God? Every circumstance in our life is about that - difficulty and blessing. If you are being severely challenged right now, God wants to be something for you. If you're walking in incredible favor and transformation, He's showing you His nature in that, as well.

God wants to declare what He is becoming to you. Like Moses, you have fresh favor to ask Him to go deeper. God is the sneakiest Person on the planet. You cannot have a desire for Him that is unmatched by His desire for you. In fact, if you really want to know where you are with God, check out what is in your own heart. What are you sighing about right now? During those times you sit in the presence of God and your heart sighs for Him, what is it you are sighing for? Understand that your sigh originated in His heart. He is longing for you, reaching out to you!



When you understand what it is your spirit is sighing for, you will understand exactly what He wants to do. You cannot have a desire or longing for God that he did not put there. Your heart for Him is simply a reflection of His heart for you; God has us longing for the things He most wants to give us.

When God showed Moses His glory, in Exodus 33, it was not a spontaneous act. God was being purposeful with His servant; He had this planned for quite a while. It was part of His step-by-step plan to reveal Himself to Moses.

What is the nature of your current request of God? In your relationship with Him, what are you asking for? What is the Holy Spirit doing in your life right now? What is He provoking in you? What are you longing for? These are questions you must think through and meditate on because God's plan for the next phase of your call is already in action. He has been purposeful with you from the very beginning.

I truly believe that there is no place for burnout in the church. People who burnout in ministry haven't properly upgraded their relationship with God. If you don't take care of your relationship with God, your ministry actually becomes a focal point and you fall into idolatry. What you think about most is what you love the most. If you are consumed with your ministry, your leadership, your church, your role, or whatever else, and you are not consumed by who God is for you, you're headed into idolatry. And burnout looms around the corner. Therefore, God must be foremost in our hearts.

When God is cemented at the fore of our hearts we see our relationship with Him deepen in ways we never thought possible. There is a place in the Holy Spirit set aside for every one of us where we can make the enemy tired, depressed, weary, confused and exasperated. It's a place where our relationship with God has a profound effect on the enemy and the people we live amongst. What we think about God can shatter the hold of darkness on our friends and family. Our intimacy with God should be our most intimidating weapon against the

enemy. We have all seen people trying to operate in authority when they just don't have it—it's painful to see. As well-trained charismatic Christians, we think getting louder is how we should try to take authority. But our authority comes out of who we are in Christ, and our capacity to intimidate the enemy comes out of our intimacy with God.

The Lord's favor is available to every single one of us. It's favor to understand God, to go to a deeper level in Him, and to upgrade our vision and image of who God is for us. It's part of coming into the next phase of accomplishing the impossible. It's a necessary revelation of who God is. It's amazing how God works. When you move into a deeper place with God, the stress that flows out of your life and ministry actually cements and establishes your upgraded relationship with him.

The antidote to stress and crisis is upgrading our fellowship with God. I know there are different things on my agenda this year related to my call, and I know that makes me vulnerable. I'm going to have to wade through some stuff about myself, fight my feelings of inadequacy, and battle insecurity. I'm confident where I am right now, but when God increases the call in my life, I know I have to go back to working through all of those issues again. I have to translate my weakness into joyful vulnerability. I must upgrade my relationship with Him, becoming more intimate than ever before.



What distinguishes a true believer, someone who is walking in the spirit as opposed to their soul—mind, will and emotions—is the favor that ties into our intimacy with God. In Exodus 33:15-16, Moses made it clear what he needed from the Lord during the next season of his life:

"If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."

Favor comes from having the presence of God traveling with us. We know we carry that favor when He lives among us. We are people of His presence; we must learn how to abide in it. We must learn how to rest, dwell, and remain in God's arms.

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Graham will be our speaker at "The Favor of the Lord" Equipping Conference on February 4-5, 2011, in St. Paul, MN. See enclosed brochure.



Graham Cooke



Living in the Future Tense

By Paul Anderson

We touch all three time zones—past, present, and future. But we don't live in all of them. Some live in...

The past.

People who live there speak more with "if only's" than with "what if's." The painful past has paralyzed them, keeping them imprisoned from a good tomorrow or a restful today. They cry, "If only I had been accepted into college... If only I had not lost my job... If only our child had not died... If only my spouse had not divorced me." Yesterday has laid claim to them, either by their mistakes or misbeliefs, or by the tyranny of others, or by the sadnesses of life. Parents who mean well but keep us from a positive identity can condemn us to our past. Full of fear or guilt, we carry no mechanism to uproot ourselves and walk into our destiny.

The paralytic encountered by Jesus models this life style. Victimized by disease, he is consigned to sit by the Pool of Bethesda and wait—and wait—and wait. When Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed, we would expect a joyful response. Instead, he says why it probably will not happen. Hope has long since been ushered out of his life. He assumes the role of victim to the fullest, irritated that others will not help him in his plight. Some victims (certainly not all) abandon the option that living responsibly could offer any possibility for a brighter future. Jesus pulled the rug out from under this invalid—He healed him. Then Jesus told him, "Stop sinning, or something worse will happen to you," showing us that this man's attitude had kept him from making necessary changes in his life.

Wounded people, victims of emotional or physical trauma, can easily fall into the trap of living more with regret than with hope. They are clouded by what has been and cannot see what could be. Their dreams have long since morphed into nightmares. They are looking back over their shoulders rather than looking forward with a gleam in their eyes. While hope stabilizes those who live with the future tense, hopelessness robs victims of an anchor, and they drift sadly in their negative emotional river of resentment and shame.

Jesus memorialized a woman more engaged with the past than willing to walk into a new destiny when He said, "Remember Lot's wife." She was assaulted by her own wrong choices. Many remain victims of Dad's lack of engagement or a pastor's wrong priorities. But in either case, making the geographical change from the state of the past to the present or the future appears unlikely. And for Lot's wife, it definitely was.

Some people, however, are chained to the past more out of pleasure than pain. Yesterday gave them joys that have long since faded, like the has-been movie star or the business executive whose company folded because he drank too much, or the church that holds rich memories of past glory but no imagination for the future. I once attended such a church. The plush red carpet and pictures on the wall of the famous former pastor (whose name everyone knows) indicated that they got stuck three decades ago. I left realizing that I had just visited a museum, not a church. Choosing pleasures long since retired seems preferable to facing up with the headaches of today. Can you blame them? When our family once left "It's a small, small world" at Disneyland and crowded onto the smoggy Santa Ana Freeway, we far preferred Fantasyland to...

The present.

Most people we know live in the present, pursuing the elusive American Dream. They adopt the philosophy that Paul condemned, "*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*" (I Cor. 15:32). Without a grasp of a preferable future, they give today their best shot. They bow before the god of Materialism and live as if tomorrow does not exist. Death speaks the final word, so they grab as many toys as they can before they stop breathing. They make happiness a goal rather than a fruit and get on the frantic fast lane, attempting to lay hold of things that rust.



Paul wrote tragically, *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world"* (2 Tim. 4:10), with an emphasis on the present. He sacrificed a sure future for an illusion. So did Judas, described by John as one who cared for himself rather than for the poor and who robbed from the treasury that sustained the Son of Man (John 12:6). Without the confidence of the resurrection, people live as if death means six feet under. What one writer calls "the tyranny of the urgent," the now of life pushes people to make irrational decisions that reduce them to puppets and eliminate their chances for a good tomorrow. The immediate trumps the ultimate. We may call such people capitalists; Jesus in a parable calls them fools. They have been deceived into thinking that what they see is what they get. In reality, they are the living dead in "this present darkness," cut off from...

The future.

Jim Eliot, in the oft-quoted word of wisdom, wrote, *"He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."* His bloody body on the shore of the Amazon River shows those willing to believe that death does not have the final word. The very men guilty of the massacre of five young missionaries later embraced the cross that had saved Jim and his partners, and they were cleansed by the blood of another Man, the Man Christ Jesus. Jim, and all who believe in Jesus, proclaim the resurrection of the body and live in the future. As Peter urges, we set our hope fully on the grace that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

So we live with a dream, but it is God-directed rather than culturally imposed. We live with glorious "what ifs": "What if God blesses our business"... "What if He gives us children"... "What if I get a scholarship"... "What if revival comes to our campus!" The past is our comrade, not our tyrant. Joe Johnson, a pastor friend, says, "You know that you are healed when you can thank God for how He has used the pain of your past." We discover to our delight that our pain, when sanctified, brings strength and blessing. So as Moses tells us to do, we look back and remember (the word is used thirteen times in his Deuteronomy sermon) the faithfulness of God. The past propels us into a certain future. We rejoice in the past; we just don't live there. We learn to see the invisible and believe the impossible. The present engages us, but it doesn't oppress us. We live as aliens from another country, where we plan to settle after this short life. We were

the wounded, but we graduated to worshipers. We march together, on a journey to the city built by God and bought by Jesus. We sing songs of hope, having left the bed of hopelessness and sprouted wings like eagles. We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the living, not the God of the dead. We plan to inherit the earth, because we have given it up for greater treasures. We sing the old Gospel song,

"This world is not my home; I'm just a passin' through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open shore, And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

Like Jim Eliot, we do not fear death because we have been given endless life. We look forward to "that day," often spoken about in Scripture. We praise God for our history, and we rejoice in our destiny.

What about those Scriptures that call us to the present, like *"Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor. 6:2) or that tell us to focus on the needs of today, not the worries of tomorrow (Matt. 6:34)? We can only live in the present if we are fixed on eternity as we are commanded (Col. 3, 1,2). Otherwise, today swallows us alive and prevents us from seeing beyond the invisible. Living by faith means setting our eyes on what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18).

We all live as victims of our past to some degree, but as we forgive others and accept responsibility for ourselves, we turn from victims to victors. No one was victimized more than Jesus, and God used His victimization for the greatest good of those who put Him there. He can do the same for those who trust in Him. On bad days, I swallow some regret and pain from the past, or I allow myself to be oppressed by the present. On better days I believe with Paul that *"our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"* (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). Like Paul, we can live today with eternity in view.



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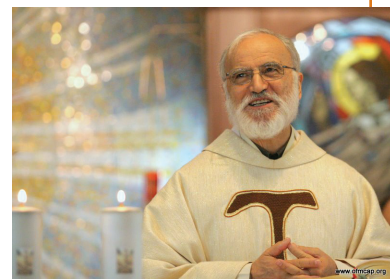
*(If you live outside of the Mpls/St. Paul Metro
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Fr. Rainero Cantalamessa is making an historic visit to
the Twin Cities on October 29-November 3, 2010. He is the
Preacher to the Pope and the most prominent Catholic who
has publicly identified himself with the Catholic Charismatic
Renewal. He has written many books and is a profound
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October 30-31, November 1: Catholic Charismatic Conference
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Fr. Cantalamessa and others will be speaking at this
conference including Paul Anderson, Lutheran Renewal
Director. Paul believes the Lord is asking him to seek practical
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This conference is open to the public. Registration and fee
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- November 2, at 7:00 p.m.,
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- November 3, at 10 a.m. and
7:00 p.m., North Heights
Lutheran Church in Arden
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There is no cost to attend the meetings on November 2-3. An
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For complete details concerning all of the above, see
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RESOURCES

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Tongues Larry Christenson addresses questions like: "Is the gift of tongues for today?" "What does speaking in tongues mean?" "Is speaking in tongues for me?" and many more. (\$8)

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Dr. Morris Vaagenes answers questions such as, "Why is baptism important?" "Is baptism a passport to heaven?" There are questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. (\$16)

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An inspiring and challenging study by Paul Anderson of 34 Christian character traits. The study gives a biblical meaning and practical application of each trait. (Workbook or Teacher's Guide: \$6 each; 8 or more, \$5 each)

Church on Fire

Morris Vaagenes tells of the transformation and spiritual renewal that came to North Heights that continues to this day. The lessons learned can be applied to individuals and churches. (\$13)

Dare to Dream

Do you want to discover your dream? Learn how to pursue it? Need to recover broken dreams? In Dare to Dream, Paul Anderson will help you to discover what God has placed inside of you! (\$10)

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Especially for Pastors

Edited by Paul Anderson, a monthly Newsletter to encourage and assist pastors as they shepherd the Lord's flock. This newsletter is available by e-mail only. (\$12 annually for e-mail version. Please include your e-mail address on the order form.)

The Father's Gift

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The Gift of Tongues (Booklet)

A biblical study of this spiritual gift by Larry Christenson. He also traces its connection with receiving the Holy Spirit, answers questions, covers theological concerns, and discusses practical aspects. (\$2.25)

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Prayer Ministry (Expanded)

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