The background is a watercolor illustration of a desert landscape. In the upper left, there is a large, abstract, multi-colored shape resembling a cloud or a mountain peak, with shades of yellow, orange, red, and pink. The sky is a pale blue. The foreground shows a group of people, some wearing head coverings, walking through a valley. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Meet Me in the Desert

**A Series of Teachings,
Devotions,
and Commentary
on the
Tabernacle of Moses**

The Rev. Bill Blomquist

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Cover artwork: Paul Choate

PSALM 63:1

O Lord, You are my God,
early will I seek thee.

O Lord, You are my God,
I am here to meet thee.

*My soul thirsts for thee,
my flesh longs for thee,
in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.*

O Lord, You are my God,
early will I seek thee.

O Lord, You are my God,
I am here to meet thee.

I am here to meet thee.

I am here to meet thee.

I am here to meet,
to meet thee.

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Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Romans 15:4 (NLT)

Preface:

About this Book

This book is a summary of Sunday school teachings I taught based upon the Tabernacle of Moses. Thus, it is written in a conversational, devotional manner. I encourage the reader to read it slowly, taking time to pause, ponder, and pray through the text at the Lord's pace. Use your inspired imagination to picture what you're reading.

Why the Tabernacle of Moses? A number of years ago I loved the song, "Dance as David Danced." It was an old Hebraic-sounding praise song that said, "When the Spirit of the Lord moves within my heart, I will dance as David danced." I couldn't get that song out of my mind. It was everywhere. I began to understand that God was speaking to me through that song. I wondered, "Where did David dance?" I opened my Bible and found that he danced around the Ark of the Covenant. That led me to read about the Ark, the Temple, and God's Presence therein. That led me to study the Ark – where it came from, who built it, why it was built – which led me to studying the Tabernacle of Moses, which has led me to writing this book, some twenty-five years later!

While there is a lot of information in these pages, that is secondary. My main intent in writing this book is all about the forming of the Christian soul. That is the nature of a devotional. I am not so much about the accumulation of information, but of Christ making Himself big in you, the reader.

That being said, "Meet Me in the Desert" is best read on three different levels:

Read

Just read it, enjoy it, and let it resonate with your heart. It stands alone as a devotional. I have included the lyrics to songs/poems that speak directly to the truths being illuminated throughout the book. You may choose to “sit” with them for as long as it takes. Make them prayers, windows of relationship between you and the Lord.

Mark

The second level is to work through the book, using it as a study guide; with your Bible open and everything. It might take longer, but it comes with greater reward. I have included numerous Biblical references and personal commentary – both Old and New Testament – which are quite insightful. I believe that everything in the Tabernacle of Moses – its walls, tents, curtains, and furniture – point to Jesus Christ. The Scriptures presented highlight this fact.

You could even pull out your own study Bible and read through the additional insights the commentators in your Bible will have. For, if the truth be known, “Meet Me in the Desert” only scratches the surface.

Inwardly Digest

The third level of reading includes both of the above with the additional invitation to live into, or actually put into practice, the proposals found in these pages. I have provided numerous ideas for this. For example, in Chapter VII, I have presented a devotion which takes the reader from one end of the Tabernacle to the other in a week. It is a powerful experience which I myself have practiced for years.

As you read, I invite you to pay special attention to the make-up and location of each ministry station in the Tabernacle, as each step in the

progression builds on the one previous. Each station has its own uniqueness and each piece of furniture runs interdependent upon the other, not unlike the Body of Christ. As you get deeper into the progression, it will begin to connect for you. As we go along, I will allude to symbols and meanings under the assumption that you have understood the previous symbols and meanings.

*May God reveal to you the Person of Jesus
in each step of the journey;
may you see Him symbolized
in new and rich ways;
may your life be
marked with the fragrance
that can only come
from sweet times of intimacy
with your Heavenly Father
in the
Holy of Holies.*

I. An Ordinary Day in the Life of a Priest

As the first rays of sunlight beam over the jagged mountains of Sinai, you rub your eyes, push a chicken off your waist, and rise to meet the new day. Peeking from the tent and looking around, you see the smoke of thousands of dying campfires hovering over the Bedouin neighborhood like a translucent linen to the left and to the right, as far as your eyes can see.

Returning to the tent, you put on your ephod, robe, and turban. Rushing out, you notice a piece of pita left over from last night's dinner and pick it up as you kiss your family goodbye. A goat bleats as you step into the rugged avenue and head for the center of what has become known as town. As you chomp on the pita, you pass one dwelling after another, each with its family, livestock, and possessions, beginning to stir with the dawn of this new day.

You see the temporality of town. You think of the new infants being born each day in this desert wilderness. You wonder how long it will be until the cloud moves again.

After a half hour walk, you come to the center of camp. Seeing the softly lit cloud rising into the twilight sky like a silent, slow moving tornado, you stand up, clear your throat, and tighten your turban. In that moment, you recall the mighty acts of Yahweh. You feel the bondage of your people and His strong arm of deliverance as He rescued you and your

people through mighty signs and wonders: the parting of the sea, the rocks coming alive with gushing water, the supernatural provision of manna each and every morning. And there before you, just over the linen fence, He dwells, silently churning in power, longing to have fellowship with you.

Working your way around the east side and finding the Gate, you step into the Outer Courts and instinctively look to the burning altar. The weary priest looks at you. His face brightens. His shift is over.

“Shalom.” ‘Peace.’

“Shalom.”

You meet him at the Laver. You wash to prepare yourself for the ministry of the day. He washes to clean himself from the ministry done through the night. You exchange small talk. He leaves the courts as you head up the ramp of the Altar of Sacrifice. At its top, you peer into the consuming fire and smoke rising from the glowing pit below.

You lift the brass grid and hang it on a hook. It clangs abrasively into the new day. Pulling out a large tong, you stoke the fire. Raking through the coals, you notice the residue of last night’s ministry: dried blood on the sides of the altar and blackened bones piled in a messy stack below. You toss fresh wood into the hellish pit until it becomes too intense to bear and then you replace the grid.

Below, just off the ramp, you hear wrestling. You turn to see a family of five. Their garments show you they’re from the tribe of Judah: a father, mother, two teen daughters, and a young boy trying to handle an unruly heifer.

“Shalom!”

Your first customers.

"Shalom. Bokah tov." 'Good morning.' You beckon them closer and meet them at the bottom of the ramp.

They approach cautiously. The father steps forward and begins a litany of confession, first confessing the sins of his family and then those of his own soul.

After hearing confession, you take hold of the rope and lead the young heifer up the ramp. With a mighty thrust, you hurl the beast onto the scorching hot brass grading where it immediately bellows and jerks uncontrollably, its skin burning within the rising smoke. Wrestling with the animal in the heat and flames, you manage to tie its neck and feet to each corner of the altar. In the midst of the screaming and violent jerking, you pull a long blade from a leather sheath and thrust it into the heart of the sacrificial animal. Its blood sprays across your face, forcing you to look away. The victim grows limp, its blood dropping and steaming off the fires below.

All the while the family looks on, offended, distraught, and teary-eyed; a tremendous cost to pay for their own wrongdoings.

Within a few minutes you have removed the inner sections of the slain and placed them aside, leaving the rest of the animal to be consumed on the brass grid.

Looking down to the family, you shout the words they are longing to hear: "God has received your sacrifice. You are forgiven!"

"Todah, todah!" 'Thank you, thank you!'

The absolution is received with clapping hands and joyful voices. The family from Judah hugs, wipes each other's tears, and heads to the Gate, filled with the joy of forgiveness. As they pass through the Gate they meet another family, this one from the tribe of Benjamin. They are a

family of eight. The mother is holding a newborn and a younger pregnant woman struggles to keep the family's bleating goat at her side.

You glance to the pillar of cloudy fire, rising from the back end of the Tent of Meeting, and follow it into the sky. It is going to be a long, long day.



As the sun blazes into midday, the heat becomes almost unbearable. Somewhere between your twentieth and thirtieth sacrifice, a whistling priest emerges at the Gate, makes his way over, and stands at the bottom of the ramp.

"Shalom!"

He is alert, perky, dressed with clean white robes and tightly wrapped tunic. He sees your bleeding hands, your face blotted with blisters and soot, your robes saturated with blood and covered with clumps of animal fur. His voice drops. "I'm here to relieve you."

You manage to muster a trace of a smile. "Shalom."

He points back to the Laver. "Why don't you come down, get cleaned up, head into the Tent and change out the Table bread?"

"Sounds like a plan."

You hobble down the ramp, across the hot sand, and come to a brass pool of crystal clear water. Pushing back your sleeves, your hands reach into the cool refreshing liquid. A clear reflection of your face appears. You look back at the man in the water and examine the wear and tear of the Lord's ministry on your face, cup your hands, and splash yourself clean of the residue of ministry.

You leave the Laver, deeply refreshed, and duck through the curtains of the Tent. At once you emerge into a radically new world of darkness, softness, stillness, and serenity. Reflections of golden flames dance about you and the smell of fragrant incense fills the room with an ancient mystery.

You have just stepped into the Holy Place.

As your eyes adjust, seven oil lamps radiating atop a four foot high, magnificent sculptured Golden Lampstand slowly come into view. They have been burning through the night and need to be refilled with virgin olive oil and have their wicks trimmed. You instinctively take the scissors and tongs and move from one lamp to the next, examining each lamp with care and diligence. Some lamps needed lots of oil, as they burned brilliantly through the night. Others needed their wicks pulled up, that they would burn more brightly. One lamp needed an entirely new wick.

Afterwards, you step back and admire the seven freshly trimmed lamps atop each vine of the Golden Lampstand, each one bathing the interior of the small, tented room with a soft, pulsating light.

My God, You are awesome!

Turning, you see a short golden table located opposite the Golden Lampstand. It is rimmed with a crown of gold which reflects majestically in the lamplight. This is the Table of Showbread; a tiny, waist high, table where you visit regularly. You take the twelve loaves of pita, stacked there within the bordering golden crown of the Table, and replace them with twelve new loaves. As you go about your ministry, you nibble on the discarded bread and place the rest of it in a burlap bag. You'll take that home for your family.

After the twelve loaves of bread are laid out into two stacks, you again notice that the bread has been pierced with a sharp object – the scars of the piercing clearly visible – as it is each time you minister.

“One day,” you mumble, “I hope I’ll know what that means. One day...”

Back at the center of the Tent, and just at the bottom of a fifteen foot high, wondrously embroidered curtain, is the smallest ministry station in the Tent. Barely a square foot around and three feet high, the Altar of Incense, like the Table of Showbread, is outlined with a golden crown and shines under the flickering light of the seven lamps. Coming closer, you lean over and bathe your face in its heavily scented smoke which rises day and night before the Holy of Holies.

You stoke the flame, toss a handful of scented spices upon its coals, and step back. You are now standing within the Trinitarian relationship of the Golden Lampstand, Table of Showbread, and Altar of Incense. The room slowly saturates with holy smoke and fragrances.

“I love this place.”

There is another place of ministry. It’s located there, just behind the curtain, in the Holy of Holies. You’ve heard it’s the actual dwelling place of Yahweh, a place reserved exclusively for the High Priests, the place where Moses and God speak to each other as friends.

What would it be like to be able to pass through the curtain and slip into the Most Holy Place? What would your response be if you were invited to enter in, see the Ark of the Covenant in all its glory, and linger there, between the wings of the cherubim, like Moses does? What would that be like: to worship Him as your Almighty God and Heavenly Father, any time of the day and any day of the week, whenever you wanted, just like Moses does?



Your peace is penetrated by the piercing screech of another sacrificial animal being tied to the horns of the Altar of Sacrifice; a lamb this time. You are startled. My goodness, where has the time gone? You quickly emerge into the blazing heat, make your way around the Brass Laver and slip stealthily through the Gate leaving the Outer Courts behind.

Rushing through the neighborhoods you notice the sun is a desert fireball, about to drop behind Mt. Sinai. You quickly pass by numerous children playing hopping and skipping games with rocks. You see women and daughters cloistered around fires, preparing the evening meals. Groups of men walk slowly up and down the avenues of the tented city in deep conversation. Some complain about the heat, others speculate how long it will be until they reach the Promised Land. As you hastily pass, they pause to notice your bloodstained, soiled garments. They know you are a priest. They nod respectfully as you pass.

Soon you arrive at your home. A few chickens are pecking around the perimeter of your tent. A fire is raging and your son is stirring a stew in the pot.

"Abba, abba!" 'Daddy, daddy!'

Your spouse looks up from her seat where she and your daughter are playing a rope game with their fingers. She rises to greet you, her face brightening as she draws near. You toss your turban into the tent where she catches up and hugs you, pressing her sun-blistered face into your soiled garments.

Your children fall into the tent as well, burying their noses into your waist.

"What is this about?" you ask, holding your family tightly.

"We love it when you come home from Temple work," they say.

“You do?” You seek to inquire deeper, “Why is that?”

The family grows silent, quietly breathing into the fabric of your robes.

“We can tell you’ve been with God,” your wife whispers. “We can smell Him. And we love to smell His fragrance upon you.”



Later that night, after supper, you rest with your family in silence, your faces highlighted with the flickering flames of the campfire. Your children are buried under blankets. One sleeps on your lap, the other on your shoulder. The camps are quiet now. The day was long. And you are tired. The millions of Israelite pilgrims are hushed and humbled by the vastness of the star-lit sky.

Suddenly a ram’s horn blares in the distance, then another, and another.

“What is it, Abba?” Your child stirs in her blanket.

“I’m not sure.”

You rise slowly and face the center of town. Within the next few minutes the tribes of the tented city come alive with shouts of joy and excitement. Men are shouting, women are wailing, and the clanging of pots and pans is echoing throughout the desert valley. Your wife and son draw near and point towards the Tabernacle of Moses.

“There, at the temple – see that?”

Your son rubs his eyes in amazement. He’s never seen anything like this. The fiery pillar, the Shekinah glory of God’s Presence, grows two, three, no, more than four times its brilliance! Looking around, you

see its radiance shining forth into every corner of the desert plain, illuminating the entire desert floor with spectacular radiance.

You look at your spouse.

“Is it moving?” She edges up to you and peers at the pillar of Living Fire from behind your shoulder. She begins to think of the ramifications of the event on her home, her kids, her community.

“I... I can't tell. My eyes are playing tricks on me.”

“It can't move now – here, today. It's been here since we were children.” She sighs in disbelief. “This is our *home*.”

“It's been so long, I was even wondering if it really ever happened at all.”

Your wife begins to count the cost of following the cloud. “Our children have lived here their entire lives. They know nothing else. Why do we have to move from here? They won't understand. Why now? Why tonight?”

But her words fade away. You are in a mental whirlwind, thinking through the logistics of the move: the camp broken down, supplies bundled up, toys and clothes in the chests, food for the camels. The kids will need to fetch the donkeys and get the goats their feed.

You stare deeper at the flaming column and, just then, it happens. The fiery pillar of the Lord's presence breaks away from the Tent of Meeting and is moving through the Outer Courts, headed towards the plain.

Within moments the air is filled with the multi-pitched screeches of ram horns. Their sobering sounds slice through the atmosphere of indecisiveness with a rare and regal authority.

“That’s it. It’s official.”

God is on the move!

Now whenever the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out on their journey, following it. But if the cloud did not rise, they remained where they were until it lifted. The cloud of the Lord hovered over the Tabernacle during the day, and at night fire glowed inside the cloud so the whole family of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys.

Exodus 40:36-38 (NLT)

Now Moses was very humble—more humble than any other person on earth.

Numbers 12:3 (NLT)



Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.

Hebrews 3:5 (NIV)

II. Conception

The Tabernacle of Moses: ancient, barbaric, liturgical, portable. Bloody, fiery, brassy, eye-squinting, dark, mysterious, fragrant, ornate, royal; skins, hooks, curtains, poles; remembrance, foreshadowing of Christ, Shekinah dwelling.

Built from precise blueprints given to Moses over a period of two forty-day stretches, it was God's dwelling place on Earth for over four hundred years; a miniature Throne Room, modeled after the real one in heaven (see Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4); scaled down to humanity and given so the children of God would worship Him. This was the structure that God used for intimacy with Israel. It provided forgiveness for the children of God and cleansing for their priests. It was the nexus between Heaven and Earth.

The Bible spends no less than fifty chapters telling us of the construction, ritual, priesthood, and transporting of the Tabernacle of Moses. Within each measurement of the structure, from linen lengths to metals, from square footage to heights, each piece of furniture, from its make-up to its contents, is the Person of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, numerous commentators have speculated that, once assembled and stationed in the center of the massive camp (Numbers 2:1-2, 3:5-10), the Israelite camp took on the shape of a cross.

As we will see, God's Passion is deeply and wondrously portrayed in the Tabernacle of Moses.

Holy Moses

It all began with Moses. God called Moses from infancy (somewhere between 1300 and 1150 B.C.). During a horrific time when Pharaoh was systematically slaughtering all male infants (in order to manage the population of the Hebrew slaves), Moses' mother, seeking to protect her son, placed Moses in a wicker basket, pushed him into the swirling currents of the Nile, and watched her boy disappear into the heart of the palace. The basket was spotted, "drawn out" (the meaning of the name Moshe', or Moses), and retrieved. Pharaoh's daughter, instantly falling in love with the baby, decided to keep him for herself. In an interesting twist, she summoned the nearby help of a "Hebrew woman" to nurse and wean the child. That woman happened to be Moses' mother.

Moses was reared in royalty and under the influence of Egyptian gods and goddesses. He learned its culture and spoke its language. He was a prince of the world.

As the years passed, Moses interfaced with the Israelites. The Israelites were a huge population of Bedouin descent that had originally settled in the land when Joseph was sold into slavery (by his brothers) some four hundred years prior. Back then, the Pharaoh was Hebrew-friendly. He granted favor to Joseph and, thus, God granted favor to him. In Moses' day, however, the Hebrews were less esteemed. They were the abused slave workforce of Egypt. Under the strong arm of Pharaoh, they were forced to build all manner of pagan temples – perhaps even the pyramids – in an effort to satisfy the pride of Egypt. The Hebrews were harshly abused and beaten and regarded as the scum of the earth. In their bondage they cried out to God.

And God heard them.

It was then when Moses' heart was mysteriously stirred. He began to develop a supernatural compassion for those he would one day be leading.

Once Moses tried to break up a squabble between a Hebrew and an Egyptian; it got quite heated. He wound up killing the Egyptian for the sake of his Hebrew brother. Of course, the Hebrew brother didn't know that Moses was *his* Hebrew brother (stealthily dressed in Egyptian clothing and royal reputation). He ridiculed Moses' actions and publicly spread his sin into the heart of the children of God. Conflicted and confused, Moses abandoned his plush life in Egypt and, running away from civilized Egypt, traded it for the bleakness of the Sinai desert.

During his time in the desert, Moses learned its ways, its seasons, its wildlife and the character of its terrain. He learned how to find water in the dry desert plain and he learned how to stay warm in the high-altitude blizzards, common in the rugged high country.

Eventually he met other wanderers such as himself, who knew nothing of his royal lineage. He yoked himself with them, herded their sheep, and married them. For a large portion of his life, that was his home, there in the desert. It became a very familiar place.

Little did he know that God was grooming him in the desert – as He grooms us in our deserts. In the near future, Moses would bring others to that same place and teach them how to survive in the same way that he was living then.

One day, Moses was shepherding his flock in the foothills of Mt. Sinai. He was drawn to a peculiar site: that of a bush being burned, but not consumed. He drew near, removed his sandals, and met God at that place. He was instructed and

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

Exodus 3:2 (NIV)

anointed by Yahweh to go back to the land of Egypt where he would lead the Hebrews out of bondage and into glorious freedom. Moses was instructed to return to the land of his past, gather the faithful, and bring them back to where he was then standing.

Moses didn't feel qualified for the task. God assured him of his power and anointing in signs and wonders. He eventually returned to Egypt, with his brother Aaron, and sought to convince Pharaoh to release the numerous Hebrew slaves. (He was eighty years old at the time.) The problem was that Pharaoh needed the Hebrews for commerce and would have no part of the plan. With the aide of miraculous signs and wonders, God eventually got His way. It was no easy task, but Moses eventually returned to that same mountain, perhaps a decade later, with two million men, their wives, families, livestock, personal belongings, and supplies.

It was during this time when God reunited with Moses, where they dwelt together over two separate forty-day stretches. Two things came about as a result of their fellowship: the revelation of the Law, or Torah as we know it, and a set of blueprints for the construction of a portable worship center. It was the fulfillment of the desire of God's heart: to have a people who would worship Him. And it would be a place where God could dwell within the heart of His people, too.

This worship center is known today as the Tabernacle of Moses.

The Word Dwelling Among Us

The word "tabernacle" itself means, "dwelling place." This earthly structure was where the God of the universe chose to dwell, or *tabernacle*, with his people.

This is our first glimpse of the Messiah found in the in the Tabernacle of Moses. In John 1:14 (NKJV) it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt [lit. *tabernacled*] among us." In the same way that God took up residence

within the tented walls of the Inner Courts, so did Jesus come to dwell among us. And Jesus will continue to abide in us – in the temples of our hearts – until one day, when we will shed our bodies (described as “tents” in 2 Corinthians 5:1, 4) and be raised to live with Him forever.

According to the Pattern

The blueprints were meticulous. Each piece of wood needed to be measured according to the pattern; each metal had to be chosen, hammered, and shaped according to the pattern; each length of linen was to be

You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.
Exodus 25:9 (NLT)

died and folded, hung and draped according to the pattern. Everything from dimensions to the heights, even down to the ingredients of incense to be burned, was in the blueprints, to be built according to the pattern (Exodus 25:9, 40).

It took nine months of gestation to build the temple and bring it together as one. Special men and women were consecrated for the oversight of the project (Exodus 35:30-36:1), while the Levites (the priests of the day) were appointed as head macho men (Numbers 3:5-8). They worked construction for the massive project. They had built many temples to pagan gods in the past. Now it was time to build one for God.

But this would be no easy task. God required vast amounts of acacia wood (the hardest wood known to man), gold, silver, brass, fine linens, animal skins and tools for it to be built according to the pattern. While the resources were challenging, the Lord funded all provisions through a single community offering. God made sure, even before they left Egypt, they would have everything needed to build the Tabernacle. He made them wealthy so they would fulfill the plan of God.

When the day arrived for the dedication of the Temple, the Levites placed the Golden Ark of the Covenant and its cover, the Mercy Seat, onto the hot Sinai sand. Then, working outward, they raised great gold-covered pillars (fifteen feet high) and fastened the towering ornate curtains to silver hooks above. They placed a Golden Lampstand, Golden Table of Showbread, and Golden Altar of Incense, all according to the pattern, in a triangular shape, just outside the curtain and covered the whole thing with gold plated beams, columns, and animal skins from four types of animals. Once enclosed, the Inner Courts looked like an ugly shoebox. It was ugly to those on the outside, but beautiful to those (on the inside) who ministered to the Lord in simplicity and intimacy.

This particular area was known as the Inner Courts or the Tent of Meeting. As shown in "Figure 1: The Layout of the Tabernacle of Moses", in the Inner Courts were two rooms: the Holy Place and, behind the curtain where the Ark and Mercy Seat sat, the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies. The Inner Courts were completely covered, a place of soothing darkness; protected from the harsh elements of the desert.

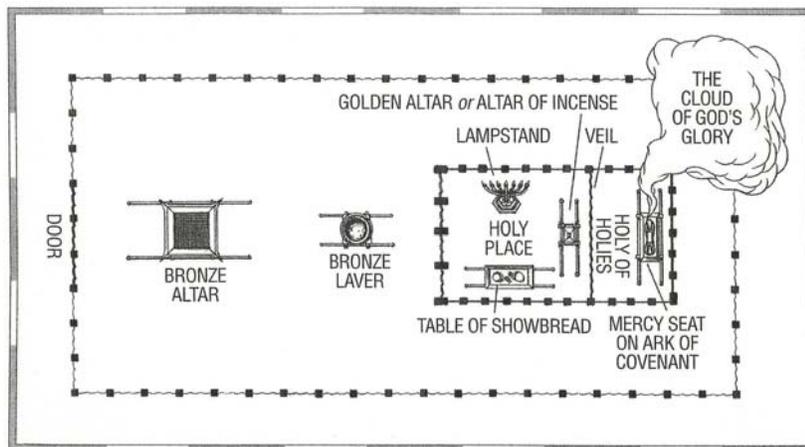


Figure 1: The Layout of the Tabernacle of Moses

Working backwards from the Inner Courts (and into the daylight), a large wash basin, made of hammered brass and looking glasses, was placed and filled with water. About twenty feet further back, a large

square structure, also made of brass, took its place in the desert sand. This entire area, including the Brass Laver and Altar of Sacrifice, is known as the Outer Courts.

Completely surrounding the Outer Courts was a series of sixty, seven-foot high, brass posts. Affixed atop the posts were silver hooks on which white linens were hung. The white linens encircled the entire perimeter of the camp, separating the sanctuary from the rest of the world.

Once fully assembled, the Tabernacle measured a mere 75 by 150 feet; roughly about half the size of a football field. And its furniture was in the shape of a cross.

Dedication Day

In Scripture we read the phrase, fire “fell from heaven,” numerous times. Fire fell and consumed Abel’s sacrifice (Hebrews 11:4; Genesis 4:1-6), fell on David’s altar at the dedication of his temple (2 Samuel 24:2), fell and consumed the saturated lumber at Elijah’s encounter with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:38-39), and fell at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). It rested on the heads of the disciples when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost (Acts 2:3), and (symbolically) at the Cross - even more evidence that our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)!

Fire also fell when the Tabernacle of Moses was consecrated for ministry. “Fire blazed forth from the LORD’s presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground” (Leviticus 9:24 [NLT]). What a site that must have been!

The fire was God’s provision. It was used to ignite all fires in the Tabernacle. In the Outer Courts, it ignited the wood which burned at the Altar of Sacrifice. Coals from that same fire were hastily carried into the

Inner Courts to light the mixed spices of incense at the Golden Altar of Incense, as well as the seven oil lamps atop the decorated arms of the Golden Lampstand.

While the fires in the Tabernacle were lit sovereignly, it was up to the Levites to maintain them. Paul writes to Timothy and reminds him to “fan the flame” that burns within him (2 Timothy 1:6). These flames were no different. God sent the fire, but the Levites had the responsibility to keep it lit.

Another ancient protocol which happened at the dedication of the Tabernacle of Moses had to do with the anointing of the seven ministry stations.

When the first animal was sacrificed and consumed with the Lord’s fire at the Altar of Sacrifice, the High Priest then took its blood, and working his way to each piece of furniture, anointed the objects with the blood of a lamb. Everything in the Tabernacle, from the Altar of Sacrifice to the Ark of the Covenant, was smeared with blood on one side.

And in the same way, he sprinkled blood on the Tabernacle and on everything used for worship. In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:21-22 (NLT)

This seemingly random act is highly significant, as it ties both ends of the progression together with the blood. The blood is needed to be redeemed and that same blood is needed to have fellowship with the Father, there in the Holy of Holies. The instructions for the High Priest to swab the Mercy Seat was no accident, as it is only through the mercy of the Slain that we have access to the Holy.

The High Priest then returned to the Outer Courts, chanted prayers of dedication, and invoked the presence of the Almighty. Up on the mountain the cloud began to move into the valley. Before the widening

eyes of millions of men, women, teens, and children of God, the living God made His way off the mountaintop and into the dust-laden streets of our common-place culture. The pillar of cloud rose above the numerous tents of the people, above the white linens of the Outer Courts, and slid naturally between the angelic wings of the Mercy Seat, where it finally came to rest; filling that desperately dark room with the everlasting Shekinah glory of God.

When the Hebrews witnessed the living glory of God rising from the top of the Tent of Meeting and into the sky as far as the eye could see, they most likely raised their hands and shouted to the God of their redemption. (Perhaps those in Heaven were even shouting as well!) This was the first time since Adam and Eve that God had returned to dwell with His people.

Following a Cloud

While God's dwelling was in the midst of the camp, it wasn't a stagnant dwelling. God was constantly moving His people through the desert and into the Promised Land. Back then, people were used to following an unpredictable God who led them into places for their own good. And when He led them, He led them by His lighted, Shekinah Presence and in the midst of the cloud.

The term "Shekinah" is not a term heard every day. It's not even recorded in Scripture. In its most basic definition, the Shekinah can be defined as the living, lighted, fiery Presence of God. Throughout the wanderings in the wilderness, God led the people by a cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night (Exodus 13:21). That essentially describes a supernatural manifestation of light, vertical in stature, rounded like a column and extending into the desert sky.

I believe the lighted Presence of God shone brighter at night because darkness seems to intensify the presence of God. I remember growing up in Cape Canaveral, Florida and watching missiles sitting on the launch pads waiting to be launched. At "blast-off," intense fire shot out from underneath and, as they lifted into the sky, the flames grew six to ten times longer than the rockets themselves! The "tails" were impressive even in daylight, but everyone loved the night launches. The flames were just as long, just more intense, and in the absence of the sun, they lit up our entire neighborhood with a soft orangey light! I can only imagine God's holy illumination over the entire Hebrew camp, faithfully burning through the night hours until the break of day.

Following the cloud was no easy chore, frustrating at best. Sometimes it stayed in one camp for a week, sometimes years; completely unpredictable (Exodus 40:36-38). Whenever it moved, it required a total breakdown of the Tabernacle and the entire community as well. Stakes were pulled. Schedules were interrupted. The entire camp was thrust into a spirit of transit, transition, and stress.

Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out.
Numbers 9:22 (NIV)

The Port-o-Temple

It was for this reason that the Tabernacle was built to be portable. Thanks to the Levites, who bore the brunt of the grunt work, it could be set up or taken down in a matter of hours. In fact, most of the components of the Tabernacle were effectively designed for pilgrimage. The Ark of the Covenant, Altar of Incense, Table of Showbread, and the Altar of Sacrifice, for example, were each built with rings that had staves, or rods, running through them. They could be covered and shouldered on the Levites within moments of God's moving.

Only two pieces of furniture did not have rods, or staves, running through them: the Golden Lampstand and the Brass Laver. Historians have speculated that while in transit, these articles may have been wrapped in animal skins and actually placed inside the upside down Altar of Sacrifice. If so, this would suggest that the ministries of these two stations, that of cleansing and giving glory to God, have their heart within – are buried within – the Blood of Christ. We'll explore that further when we look at those two pieces in further depth.

When in transit, the parade of furniture was covered with animal skins; non-impressive to say the least. To the other non-Hebrew tribes they passed as they followed the pillar of fire, the treasured objects of gold and royalty would have gone completely unnoticed.

This speaks to the fact that God's holiness is reserved for the faithful and is essentially unrecognizable to the rest of the world. The world only sees brick buildings, stages, and parking lots. But the beauty of holiness is reserved for those who, by entering through Christ, transcend what is seen and worship Him in Spirit and Truth. To the unchurched, Christian worship may seem bland and perhaps even contrived. That's because they are blinded to the intimate splendor of His majesty – intimate splendor reserved only for those who have given all and wholeheartedly follow the cloud, day in and day out.

I would imagine that, like today, following the cloud was no easy task. The desert was filled with ravines, valleys, dangerous down slopes, and wild animals. In addition, the sheer spontaneity of God must have taken the tribes by surprise. The Bible says, "Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the Tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up" (Exodus 40:36-37 [NKJV]). Sometimes the cloud was stationed for years, other times only for a week.

Following the cloud must have been quite an adventure! I am sure there were times when they wondered where this God of theirs was leading them! In all their travels, they could be assured that God was with them – *Immanuel*. They could see the cloud. They *knew* He was in their midst, leading them as a faithful Shepherd into the Promised Land.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
Even when I walk
through the darkest valley
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
Surely your goodness and unfailing love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalm 23 (NLT)

*Then make the courtyard for the Tabernacle, enclosed
with curtains made of finely woven linen.*

Exodus 27:9a (NLT)



*Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me,
"Who are these who are clothed in white?
Where did they come from?"*

And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows."

*Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died
in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes
in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.*

*"That is why they stand in front of God's throne
and serve him day and night in his Temple.*

*And he who sits on the throne
will give them shelter.*

*They will never again be hungry or thirsty;
they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.*

*For the Lamb on the throne
will be their Shepherd.*

*He will lead them to springs of life-giving water.
And God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

Revelation 7:13-17 (NLT)

III.

The Outer Courts

The Outer Courts consisted of the “outer place” surrounding the Tent of Meeting. It was open-aired and exposed to the elements of the desert: wind, sunshine, and sometimes rain. It provided a gathering place where God’s people both fellowshiped and watched the priests offer sacrifices on their behalf. It contained two stations of worship: the Altar of Sacrifice and the Brass Laver.

Heavy Metal

Metals have great significance with regard to the Old Testament. For example, brass symbolizes judgment. Scripture records that at one time God set the heavens like brass above His rebellious people. Their sins of pride had “walled” them off from God and their prayers barely got off the ground before bouncing off of the judgment of God (Leviticus 26:18-20, Deuteronomy 28:23). This is the essence of brass: humanity and Divinity forever separated by the wall of sin.

All of the brass used in the building of the Tabernacle, all 2.5 tons of it, is found here, in the Outer Courts, and nowhere else. This speaks to a core function of this part of the Temple, that of reconnecting God and man, removing the barriers that keep us from enjoying fellowship with the Father.

As brass is equated with judgment and sets the would-be worshipper at odds with his Maker, other metals found in other parts of the Temple equally symbolize other things. The 3.7 tons of silver, for

example, symbolizes redemption and the one ton of gold used in the Temple symbolizes royalty.

Living Pillars

The courts themselves had a single entranceway through which everyone passed and were surrounded by a glorious fence, 75 feet across by 150 feet deep, of white linen held by a number of seven foot high columns, sixty of them to be exact. It's interesting to note here that like the sixty columns surrounding the Outer Courts, there are sixty generations from Adam to Christ.

The columns themselves were made of an extremely hard wood called acacia, or *shittium* wood. Acacia wood is the only wood used in the Tabernacle and is known to be the hardest wood in the world. This was the backbone for the temple and symbolizes raw earthiness and humanity. Most of the pieces of furniture in the temple were hewn from wood and covered with a chosen metal. Here, in the Outer Courts, brass covered the wood, which speaks to humankind (wood) under the judgment (brass) of the Lord. In the Inner Courts, it all changes. There, gold becomes the metal of choice. Gold symbolizes divinity and in most cases is hammered to the acacia wood. This speaks to Jesus who was fully God (gold) and completely human (wood).

The sixty columns surrounding the Temple courts were mounted in brass and had crown-like silver hooks on their "heads." White linens were attached to the silver crowns and stretched around the entire perimeter of the Tabernacle.

In the columns, we have a beautiful description of the followers of Christ, who are called *pillars* of faith (1 Timothy 3:15). The columns stood in sockets of brass, indicating our humanness and separation from God. Yet, by the grace of redemption, symbolized by the silver crowns, we have

been made princes and princesses unto God and have been clothed with fine linens, which is the righteousness of the saints (Revelation 19:7-8).

As we come to Christ, Jesus exchanges our sin and shame with garments of purity (Zechariah 3:4; Isaiah 61:10). We are no longer old, but new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). From here on out, it's not a matter of who we are, but in Whom we are clothed.

There is a wonderful song from the '80s that was popular in the Bible study I was attending at the time. It went like this:

*I am covered over with the robes of righteousness
that Jesus gives to me.
I am covered over with the precious blood of Jesus
and He lives in me.
What a joy it is to know
my heavenly Father loves me so
and gives to me my Jesus.
When He looks at me He sees not what I used to be,
but He sees Jesus.*

This song is a wonderful reminder that, although we may remember our sins, God does not. When He looks at us there is a gauze-like righteousness that hides all we have been. The righteousness of Christ covers all we are. It's all God chooses to see.

I once heard a man tell of a dream he had. He had died and gone to heaven and was standing before God's Throne. The Lord peered down and said, "John, come a little closer." So he stepped forward. He said it again, "John, come a little closer." So he stepped up a couple more steps.

*"Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen,
bright and clean,
was given her to wear."
Revelation 19:6b-8 (NIV)*

Then the Lord said, "No John, come a little closer; I want to see how much of my Son Jesus is in you." That's what it's all about: being clothed with

His grace and being filled with the Spirit of the Lord; two essential things that happen in the Outer Courts.

Church

The pillars also speak to the cloistering of the saints. By that, I mean, the gathering of the faithful: the saints, the church. God does amazing things within the “perimeter of the faithful.”

We, the people of God, are a living sanctuary, a Temple of the Holy One. When we gather, God gathers as well. Indeed, the Apostle Peter writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5 [NIV]).

Gateway to Heaven

By virtue of the saints creating a wall around the perimeter of the temple, the worshipping community was restricted to entering the Temple through a single entry. We know that Gate to be Christ (John 10:7).

Many have sought to know God outside of knowing Christ. It simply can’t be done. Many have sought out all types of devices, both spiritual and intellectual, to be united with God. Outside of Jesus Christ, they will always come up short.

God has given the world the way in which to inherit eternal life. It is free to us, but it cost Him everything. When we hear people questioning “alternative routes” to heaven, we need to bring them back to the exclusivity of Christ:

*“I am the way,
the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father
except through me.”*

John 14:6 (NKJV)

His exclusive claims and His exclusive sacrifice. In God’s sovereign design, no one will get in by sneaking in by another gate (there is no other

gate); no one will get to heaven by any other religion or the perfection of any particular lifestyle; no one will get in by Gandhi, Buddha, John Smith, or Shirley McClain.

Just as there was only one way into the Outer Courts, there is only one gateway for the sheep: Jesus Christ. He was, and is, and will always be, the only Son of God.

Ministry to People, for People, and by People

All ministry performed in the Outer Courts, as you will see, was done solely for the people. It was “all about “me,” if you will. And that was a very good thing.

God created the Outer Courts to prepare us for intimate fellowship, which would happen later, deeper in the Inner Courts. There were two ministry stations here, the Altar of Sacrifice and the Brass Laver. Both were essential “steps” in the progression and had to do with the forgiveness and cleansing of the worshipper.

It can be difficult to receive ministry for ourselves, especially in a faith that calls its disciples to such a radical selflessness. While that is true (and will happen later in the progression), these stations are there for good reason. As we shall see, they are there for “my” forgiveness and for “my” cleansing.

It won't always be this way, of course. Yet, at this place in our study, it's where we need to be.

We need to capture what Christ did for us; embrace it and receive it fully into the deepest places of our souls. Only then will we be able to rise into victorious ministry and have intimate fellowship with the Father in the Tent of Meeting.

Thus, the Outer Courts was an exciting place to be. People prepared to enter through the Gate. They arrived expectantly to offer sacrifices to God. They knew God would meet them and they would leave the Temple having been forgiven through His Blood. This was a cause for celebration, cause for hands and voices to be lifted unto the Lord so that the earth would quake with the praises of the children of God.

ENTER INTO (PSALM 100:4)

Enter into,
enter into His Gates with praise.
Into His courts,
into His courts giving praise to His Name.

*We will sing, we will dance,
we will clap our hands,
and sing a song of praise to the Lamb.
Awake, my soul; in Him rejoice.
Come and lift up a shout of praise
with your voice!*

Lift up your hands,
lift up your hands in the Holy Place.
He is our God,
He is our Father of mercy and grace.

*We will sing, we will dance,
we will clap our hands,
and sing a song of praise to the Lamb.
Awake, my soul; in Him rejoice.
Come and lift up a shout of praise
with your voice!*

*Sing your praise to the Lamb,
"Hallelu, Hallelujah!"
Lift a shout with your voice,
"Hallelu, Hallelujah!"*

"Using acacia wood, construct a square altar 7½ feet wide, 7½ feet long, and 4½ feet high. Make horns for each of its four corners so that the horns and altar are all one piece. Overlay the altar with bronze. Make ash buckets, shovels, basins, meat forks, and firepans, all of bronze. Make a bronze grating for it, and attach four bronze rings at its four corners. Install the grating halfway down the side of the altar, under the ledge. For carrying the altar, make poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. Insert the poles through the rings on the two sides of the altar. The altar must be hollow, made from planks. Build it just as you were shown on the mountain."

Exodus 27:1-8 (NLT)



When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:13-15 (NIV)

A. The Altar of Sacrifice

The first place of ministry was the Altar of Sacrifice. It was made of brass, approximately 7½ feet square and 4 feet high. It was hollow with intense fire from below. There was a grid, probably a foot or so below the rim, and short stake-like handles on each of its four corners, called “horns,” to which the struggling animal would be secured.

This was the first ministry station worshippers saw as they entered into the courts. It was the largest piece of furniture in the Temple. It was here that worshippers were confronted, in a gruesome manner, with their unholy stance before a holy God.

Living animals were wrestled and cast down upon the red-hot grid of brass, and were strapped to the “horns of the Altar.” Within moments, the priest would slash the throat of the animal, thrust a blade into its gut and begin the liturgical task of emptying its cavity of its stomach, liver, heart, and entrails. What wasn’t removed was burned until its remains fell through the grid onto the flames below.

Day and night, these sacrifices bled over the fires of forgiveness, their blackened fumes rising high into the desert sky for all to see. Over the course of four hundred years of temple worship (which included David’s Tabernacle and the temples of Solomon and Herod), the rising smoke became a visible reminder of the appeasement of Eden’s sin and offered a poignant foreshadowing of the crucified Lamb of God, who would one day be strapped to a cross and lifted up, for the world to see.

The Cross

It is difficult NOT to see the images of forgiveness and reconciliation through Christ reflected in the blood-stained, sun-soaked brass of the Altar of Sacrifice. As the Hebrews were spared from the angel of death by swabbing their doorposts with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12:12-13), we too are spared from eternal death as we get under (as we are swabbed with) the Blood of the Passover Lamb.

In the days of old, it was a matter of offering and reoffering sacrifice after sacrifice, time and time again, to assure God's people of their cleansing and forgiveness.

But Jesus changed all that. Halleluiah!

Forgiveness is still impossible outside the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22), but we appropriate that same blood by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 9:19-25).

People ask me, "Bill, how can I know God?" I tell them about God's love. They like that. I tell them God has a destiny, a purpose and plan for them. They like that. I tell them the only way to get to God is through "Christ's Blood," which covers all sin.

And that's when things go south. People don't like to be confronted with the old world notion of "sin." They want all the God without any of the gore.

Yet God placed the Altar of Sacrifice as the very first ministry station in the Outer Courts. Why did He do that? He did that to make a

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Hebrews 9:12-14 (NIV)

point: "In order to get to Me, you have to deal with your sin." Long story short: God accepts no one outside the identification with His Son. And that is found only in the Blood of the Lamb.

My Rags for His Riches

Once when driving home from work, I noticed a construction crew putting a new roof on a church. They were busy ripping off the old roof, laying out tarpaper, smearing hot tar, and dropping stones. It was late in the day and by that time the roofers were shirtless. I looked at the cross atop the church and was horrified at what I saw: they had used the cross as a clothes hanger; their tar-stained and (no doubt) odor-enhanced articles of clothing hanging from the crossbeams and the main staff of the cross. It was barely recognizable as a cross.

I slowed down and peered through my windshield to the blasphemy above. "Lord," I prayed, "Look what those guys have done to your Cross?!"

Within a moment I heard the Lord say, "Look again."

So I looked again. Suddenly, it made sense to me. The Cross was given to hold our filthy rags, given that we might have a place to be released of our tar and stench. Those roofers were doing just what they should have been doing. They were hanging their burdens on the ever-so-competent arms of the Cross.

Since then, whenever I've been hesitant to approach the Lord and confess my sins (again and again – did I say again?), I am reminded of the function of the Cross. Jesus died to take away my sin. By withholding my sins, I rob Him of that which He came to rob.

Bloody and Beautiful, Horrific and Healing

While Calvary is a crude place, it is equally wonderful. There is an amazing component to the Cross that remains unseen until we are committed to its way.

As we pass through the Cross, we not only receive forgiveness for the things we have done, but we receive healing for the sins done to us.

The Cross is much more than my sin being removed and forgiven by God's grace. The Cross also serves as an avenue by which God's grace reaches into me and restores the wounded places in my own heart, places where I have been victimized by the sins of others towards me.

As I believe in God's work at Calvary, it opens up a glorious fountain wherein the sins that others have done to me are also forgiven, cleansed and healed. This happens as I appropriate the Blood over my life. I call this the all too wondrous "backside" of the Cross: not only my salvation, but my healing and eternal life, all from a splintered fiery instrument of judgment. Andy Park's song, "At the Cross," wondrously speaks to this:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace
was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)

*I know a place, a wonderful place,
where accused and condemned
find mercy and grace,
where the wrongs we have done
and the wrongs done to us
were nailed there with Him,
there on the Cross.*

*At the Cross, He died for our sin;
at the Cross, He gave us life again.*

A Doorway

While an understanding of the crucifixion of Christ is essential, know it is part of a much larger design which is ultimately geared to bring us to the Father. While we need the Cross, we are not meant to remain at the Cross. The Altar of Sacrifice is only the first of seven places of ministry in the Tabernacle of Moses, each essential in the progression into the Holy of Holies.

Is the Cross important? Yes, by all means. We would be nowhere without it. Yet, it is the key, if you will, into the door of deeper spirituality.

While it is easy to stay gazing at the Suffered, strapped to the horns and lifted up for the world to see, the Suffering God pleads with the grateful onlooker, "Never cease to embrace My work; remember what I have done for you, the torture I endured for the punishment of Eden's sin. But don't stop at the Cross. Bring the Cross with you as you minister deeper unto Me. Move through the courts and yearn to be washed in the Living Word. Come into My tent; be consumed by My glory, nourished by My sustenance; intercede with me within the fragrance of holiness. But don't stop there, either. Come even closer; commune with Me between the wings of the cherubim; rest your weary feet as we fellowship on the Mercy Seat."

FORGIVING GOD

Forgiving God, I come before You now,
to offer You my sin and shame.
From Your Altar of Living Sacrifice,
shed forth Your grace to me.

*O, I watched You die;
O, I beat Your face.
O, Your body crucified;
I live; You're disgraced.*

Forgiving God, I must confess to You,
in word and deed, I've mocked Your Blood.
Transfer from me the death that I deserve,
onto the One on the tree.

*O, I watched You die;
O, I beat Your face.
O, Your body crucified;
I live; You're disgraced.*

Forgiving God, I stand in awe of You,
for by Your stripes, I am healed.
Clothe me, I pray, in Your robes of righteousness,
washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

*O, I watched You die;
O, I beat Your face.
O, Your body crucified;
I live; You're disgraced.*

"Make a bronze washbasin with a bronze stand. Place it between the Tabernacle and the altar, and fill it with water. Aaron and his sons will wash their hands and feet there. They must wash with water whenever they go into the Tabernacle to appear before the LORD and when they approach the altar to burn up their special gifts to the LORD—or they will die! They must always wash their hands and feet, or they will die. This is a permanent law for Aaron and his descendants, to be observed from generation to generation."

Exodus 30:18-21 (NLT)



*Just as Christ loved the church,
He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean,
washed by the cleansing of God's word.
He did this to present her to himself as a glorious
church without a spot or wrinkle
or any other blemish.*

Ephesians 5:25b-27 (NLT)

B. The Brass Laver

The Laver was the second ministry station in the progression. Since it was located in the Outer Courts, it sat under the same blazing sunlight as the Altar of Sacrifice. Both the Altar and Laver were made of brass. Other than that, the difference between the two is like night and day.

Not much is known about the Brass Laver; its size, its weight, or even precisely where it stood in the Outer Courts is unspecified in the Scriptures. In the years to come, there would be other temples with multiple lavers as well, some of them measuring over fifteen feet across. But our Laver was most likely the size and stature of a large baptismal font, perhaps three to five feet across and about waist high.

We do know it was created from brass (the common metal in the Outer Courts), lined around the interior with hundreds of mirrors, and filled with water. It lies in stark contrast with the harshness of the previous ministry station. The Altar of Sacrifice was a symmetrical box of fire, heat, torture, blood, and death. The Laver, with its rounded rims and brimming clear water, was a place of solitude, refreshment, and renewal. It provided a place for the cleansing and refreshment for the priests, a place where priests both prepared for ministry and were cleansed from ministry.

Holy Scripture

The hundreds of fractured pieces of glass fastened around the interior of the Brass Laver acted as mirrors for the priests. These looking glasses (as with everything needed to build the Tabernacle) came from a single offering and were specifically given by the Hebrew women (Exodus 38:8).

Before the Lord delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage, He knew they would need to bring with them the brass, silver, and gold needed to provide for the building of the Tabernacle. So, in short, He made them wealthy. When they left Egypt they plundered their four hundred year old enemy, robbing them of precious gems, jewelry, art, ornate linens, coinage and metals (Exodus 3:21; 12:35-36). This is a wonderful illustration of how God's plans are met through the provision of His people.

Peering into the Laver, the priest could gaze through the water and see the reflection of his face. The reflection revealed where the water needed to be appropriated. If there was sooty residue on his forehead, for example, the mirrors revealed it, and the priest knew where to wash.

This is a beautiful picture of sanctification. The Word of God is illustrated in Scripture as water. As we read the Word (or, peer into the Laver), God reveals places where we are then able to appropriate God's healing grace. In this way, we are cleansed and sanctified with the washing of water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26). This illustrates the need for Christians to spend time reading and studying the Bible.

As we peer into the water of the Word, it reflects who we are, and what we need to do to live holy lives. James writes, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it." (James 1:22-25 [NLT]).

That's why it is essential for us to peer into the water of the Word, establishing and anchoring ourselves

*As water reflects a face,
so a man's heart reflects the man.
Proverbs 27:19 (NIV)*

in the Scriptures, on a daily basis. When a saint spends time reading the

Word she is reminded of who she is in Christ, her stance as a child of God. She will be reminded of His promises and the assurance of her glorious future in heaven. She will be empowered, refreshed, and blessed, even in the driest spiritual desert. Finally, she will be able to wash herself of any “spiritual smudge marks” revealed as she gazes into the very fountain of life.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the Living Water (John 7:37-39). The water in the Laver also speaks as a symbol of the powerful infilling, fruit, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit, both in our hearts and in our ministries, is often underestimated. Yet it is essential in order to walk in the footsteps of Christ. The Spirit cleanses us, equips us with gifts, and fosters His fruit in our lives. The Spirit delivers us from personal demons, heals us and fills us with the power of God to witness for Christ. Even the most theologically astute saint will dry up without intentional, daily visits to the Laver.

When Christ left Earth, He expressly forbade His disciples to do any ministry until they had been clothed with power from on high, empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). While that must have been frustrating for them to hear, it underscores the absolute priority of the Holy Spirit’s power in the life of a saint.

I can hear it now, “What do you mean, ‘go to Jerusalem and wait until we’ve been clothed with power from on high?!’ We’ve been with you for three years. We know how to do the stuff!”

I’m sure that was endearing to Jesus. He was a man and knew what it meant to be impulsive and impatient. Yet, He also knew they needed power. And, some forty days later, at Pentecost, power was

released. The conversion of three thousand souls (Acts 2:41) was only the beginning!

The power of the Holy Spirit in our lives cannot be underestimated. You see, we have been born again into a spiritual world so we need the Holy Spirit to navigate through it all. John writes that God is a Spirit and we must worship Him in both Spirit and truth (John 4:24). It is a spiritual world that we've been called into and nothing but the Holy Spirit will empower us to live victoriously in Christ. Many of us are highly skilled and quite professional in nature, yet only as we learn to operate under the gifted influence of the Spirit will we ever obtain lasting fruit.

The apostle Paul was a wonderful illustration of this. He was a well-educated, savvy debater and theological whiz-kid, yet he intentionally chose to know nothing other than Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (which points to the essentialness of the Altar of Sacrifice). To the church at Corinth he wrote, "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Corinthians 2:3-5 [NIV]).

What was the source of Paul's power? The Spirit. And where did he get the daily power he needed to perform his ministry? Here, at the Laver.

That's why it's essential that we, as transforming followers of Christ, be extremely familiar with the Laver. As we witness Christ to the nations (or at the gas station) the daily washing, filling, and anointing waters of the Holy Spirit assure us others will see Jesus, and no one else. His Spirit, in us, bears witness to the world that we are children of God (1 John 5:6).

The Brass Laver is the ultimate filling-station for the saint on his way to heaven. It is both the baptism of the Holy Spirit – that which was

promised and performed by Jesus (Acts 1:8 and Mark 1:8) – and the place where we receive the ability to be filled, pray and walk in the Spirit, time and time again (Ephesians 5:18; Ephesians 6:18; Galatians 5:16).

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

John 7:37-39 (NIV)

Finally, let me remind the reader that the infilling of the Holy Spirit is an ongoing event in the life of a Christian. It is no less a single experience than filling my car with gasoline on January 1st and believing it will provide me with enough gas to get me through the year. God's Spirit fell on and filled people multiple times in the Scriptures and He still does. The word "filled" as used in Ephesians 5:18 (NIV), "be filled with the Spirit," is written in the "continuous present" tense, meaning it is a continuous, ongoing experience. I encourage you to visit the Laver each and every day!

Holy Baptism

The Brass Laver also speaks to the Sacrament of Baptism.

Liturgically speaking, it is through the waters of Baptism where we come into contact with the One who cleanses us, fills us, and seals the work of Calvary in our hearts. We are saved through the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4ff).

This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:21 (NIV)

Orthodoxy or Progressive Theology?

The ministry of the Laver also serves as a litmus test for Biblical Orthodoxy.

We are continuously confounded with strange doctrines and popular "Oprah theologies." Much of what is being promoted in the name of the church is also said to be "Spirit-led," or "a new teaching from the Holy Spirit." The Apostle John instructed his reader to "test the spirits" to see if they were from God (1 John 4:1f).

If the Brass Laver holds the water, which I have suggested is akin to both Scripture and the Spirit, then the framing of the Laver itself – its perimeter, depth, width, etc. – forms the trajectory wherein we can judge both "new revelations of the Spirit," and test the validity of charismatic experiences. If the proposed experience flows within the parameter of the Word, it's of God. If the proposed "spiritual revelation" suggests a practice which lies outside of the parameter of the Word, then it is not of God. That stream will not be reinforced by the Word and will dry up.

Thus, the activities of the Holy Spirit must fall within the parameters of the Word of God. All so-called "moves of the Spirit" must lie within the tenets of the Word of God. All genuine activities of the Holy Spirit are reflected in the Living Word.

Laver Man

There are other significant applications of the Tabernacle which the studious theologian may enjoy exploring. But, as for me, I find myself returning again and again to the Laver.

I gave my heart to Christ in November of 1977 on a beach in Central Florida. For me it was all about "giving in" to the Lordship of Christ. I had been wallowing around in mud and squandering my wealth

for far too long and it was time to get on to the things God had planned for me. So there, sitting in the sand and staring out at the roaring wave I said, "God, I don't know who you are or where I'm supposed to be, but I've heard it said that I need to invite Jesus Christ into my heart and I will be saved. So, Father even though it doesn't make sense to me – I now invite Jesus into my heart. Do with me what you will. Amen."

When I arose from that beach I had a strong sense that something "very right" had happened. Over the course of the following months I went out, bought a Bible, read it every day, and began to see the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere I went.

Yet I still lived in the same house, there on the beach. The same people were there with their same lifestyles. Every night was another party. I found wonderful satisfaction by being able to be in the same room with my friends and not under the compulsion to share in the activities. As the nights wore on, however, I grew increasingly frustrated with my faith. There were times when I lacked power to keep the straight and narrow road.

"Where is your power, Lord?" I prayed.

Before my repentance I had experienced quite a bit of exposure to "power" (through my experience with cults and the occult). It was "dark power," but it was power all the same. And I knew that God was bigger than Satan, so part of the conversion package would be the acquisition of power to overcome the evil one. Yet I was not experiencing the fullness of God's power. Where was this so-called "victorious life in Christ"?

Within a year of my conversion I received a call from a friend who invited me to go to a "church meeting at the old Quality Courts Hotel on A1A, Cocoa Beach." I was familiar with the place and hitchhiked up there from my place near Patrick Air Force Base. The instant I walked into the room I was literally overcome with something I had never experienced:

the power of God's love. There it was! God was in the place. I met my friends and we sat down about ten rows back on the right side. I looked around in awe. People everywhere were laughing and hugging each other. The room was electric (and the band hadn't even played yet!).

As the worship began, the presence of God filled the praises of the people. It was thick, almost cloud-like. On the stage were normal people just like me. They had blue-jeans and long hair. And their faces were brilliant with the presence of God's undeniable joy. They sang for thirty minutes. I didn't know any of the songs, but it didn't matter. I had arrived home and I felt that even if I sang the wrong notes it would still be "right" somehow.

At one point in the worship the leader led us into something which I now know to be "singing in the Spirit." He played one chord on his guitar and everyone sang their own words of adoration to the Lord. None of it was rehearsed, but it was the most beautiful sounds and melodies I have ever heard. Most people were standing, hands upheld wide. I was overwhelmed and sat down, closed my eyes and was carried into the heart of my Father.

Behind me was a man (also sitting) singing in what I know now to be "tongues." He went on and on with haunting melodies of praise. As I listened to him I found myself completely riveted to his song. Then, as the congregation swelled in noise, this man's song turned into a prayer for me. The more he sang, the more I began to experience the power of God's love being poured out to me through the Holy Spirit.

Then I saw in my mind a vision of a door. The door was opened about an inch and there was intense light pouring in from around the top, side, and bottom of it. As I looked at it, I heard the Lord say this:

"Now Bill. You know I love you."

I nodded. "Yes, Lord, I do."

"And I will never love you any more or any less than I love you now. You know that, right?"

"Yes, Lord, I do."

Then there was a pause. I looked at the light beaming from around the rims of the door. It fascinated me.

"But I have more for you. Do you want more?"

"Oh yes, Lord, you know I - "

And before I could finish the statement, the door flew open and I was immersed in the overwhelming light of Christ. In an instant, I saw the horridness of my sin - its effect and stain - completely embraced by God's unconditional, holy love. It was unbelievable - but it was happening. Over the course of that time of singing in the Spirit, the waters of the Living Laver were being poured out upon my heart, washing me of my sin and filling me with the unimaginable power of the Holy Spirit.

I keeled over in my chair and, for the first time since junior high school, sobbed. My heart had been that broken. And the more I sobbed, the louder the man behind me sang in tongues. It went on for quite some time. (I never wanted it to end. I had finally received the desire of my heart.) My friends had to help me to leave the building. As I rose from the seat I sought to see the face of the man (who today I understand was interceding for me) behind me. But he was looking away, preoccupied with reading a song sheet or something. Just an ordinary guy doing extremely extraordinary things!

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
he is a new creation;
old things have passed away;
behold, all things have become new.
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)*

As we walked into the foyer of the hotel, I overheard one of my friends talking to another.

"Hey, did you see what happened to Bill tonight?"

"No, I didn't. What happened?"

"He was baptized with the Holy Spirit."

"Baptized with the Holy Spirit," I thought. "What does that mean?"

Regardless of what they called it, all I know is that I was invited to a worship meeting and the Holy Spirit washed over me with cleansing and power, completely taking me by surprise! And it changed my life.

That was my first visit to the Laver, and there have been many since. The Laver is always there for us, her waters never stale or dirty. Why not pause now, bow your head, and ask God to fall on you afresh with the power of the Holy Spirit, as typified in this wonderful and mysterious place of ministry?

FALL ON ME

Jesus, Jesus,
come and heal my soul.

Jesus, Jesus,
come and make me whole.

*With Your wind,
breathe into my sin.*

*With Your rain,
cleanse me once again.*

*With Your fire,
make holy my desire.*

In the stillness of this place,

fall on me.

Jesus,

fall on me.

Jesus,

fall on me.

Jesus,

fall

on

me.

*I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God!
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.
I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit
or a bride with her jewels.*

Isaiah 61:10 (NLT)



*Therefore, there is now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus!*

Romans 8:1 (NIV)

C. Summary of the Outer Courts

We have come to the end of our stay in the Outer Courts. The Outer Courts is by and large the place where the majority of American Christians spend most of their time. It's a wonderful place, designed with you and me in mind.

God loves us, He has established this part of the Tabernacle for our own well being, in a way wherein we may be continuously forgiven and cleansed by His grace. In this part of the Temple, we appropriate Christ's Blood sacrifice through faith and are empowered to live a new life in Christ.

Let's take a look at some overriding themes of the Outer Courts.

A Beautiful Balance: Forgiveness and Sanctification

Both ministry stations in the Outer Courts, the Altar of Sacrifice and the Laver, are very different, with very different, unique roles. One is identified with blood, the other, water. One is harshly-defined; a hot box of slaughter and jagged edges; the other is stealthy with rounded, indefinable parameters. One is surrounded by the useless cries of its victims; the other lies tranquil in silence and solitude. One forgives sin, the other washes its residue. Both work as one to reveal the ministry of Christ to the beloved: "sanctification" and "forgiveness."

While Christ's death (at the Altar) removes us from the sting of death, His Spirit (at the Laver) forms and fashions us into the image of the Father.

Blood and Water

A most amazing insight of the Outer Courts has to do with the interactions between Blood and Water. As John writes in 1John5:6, "And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony."

Once our hands have been cleansed in the water and our hearts forgiven in the Blood, we are now ready to

*"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or, who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart."*

Psalm 24:3-4a (NKJV)

"draw near to God" and pass through the veils to the Ark of the Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews further links the functions of the Blood with Water when he writes, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22 [NKJV]).

Additionally, after Christ was crucified (in the "Outer Courts" of the blazing noonday sun), a soldier came to Jesus and "pierced his side with a spear." An amazing thing happened: "Immediately blood and water flowed out" (John 19:34 [NLT]).

Word and Spirit

Jesus calls us to worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth. In terms of our discussion, He calls us to worship the Father at the Laver and the Altar.

We praise God in the Outer Courts for His graciously received, wonderful provisions!

I would like to encourage you to visit the Altar of Sacrifice and Brass Laver each and every day. Of course, I'm not suggesting returning to the Cross, time and time again, to get resaved. Christ's death was enough to secure eternal salvation the first time. But there is a daily build up of forgivable sins which routinely need to be taken to the Cross.

Likewise, we don't need to be completely saturated with the Spirit - washed, cleansed, sanctified, redeemed, anointed and delivered each and every day. No, we look into the Laver and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the specific areas of our hearts needing His Spiritual attention. We have been made clean by the Word spoken to us. Jesus needs only to wash us here and there. "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean" (John 13:10 [NIV]).

Conversion and baptism, forgiveness and filling, and blood; all are given freely by God to anyone who will ask, here in the Outer Courts.

We Need Our "Me Times"

Some say there is no room in the Faith to be selfish. But I take issue with that, especially in light of this discussion of the Outer Courts. I believe there are times and places where it's okay to be selfish, especially when appropriating Christ's work on the Cross on our behalf. When we refuse (for whatever reason)

*My lover spoke and said to me,
"Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
and come with me.
See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.
Flowers appear on the 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.
Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me."
Song of Solomon 2:10-13 (NIV)*

to lay hold of Christ's salvation, it is offensive to our Lord.

The gift of eternal life is undeserved, but given. Free to us, but cost Him everything. Free - just for the asking. He did it all so that we might be saved and filled with the Spirit. All it takes is the choice to make it happen.

Peter says it best: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38 [NKJV]).

On the surface, it does seem a bit selfish: MY repentance, MY baptism, MY Holy Spirit; and, if that were the extent of our lifelong progression into the temple, it would be. But the receiving of these gifts is essential if we expect to adequately minister in the deeper areas of the Tabernacle. And those "deeper places" are just around the corner.

Would you join me in a prayer confessing Christ as Savior and asking for the infilling of the Holy Spirit?

*Almighty Father,
I come to You now
through the Blood of Jesus.
I proclaim that You are the Bread of Life
and the Light of the World.
I believe that You were crucified
for the sins of the world –
including mine.
And I ask that You would forgive all my sin,
wash away all its residue,
and fill me with Your Holy Spirit.
Pour into my heart Your love
through the Holy Spirit.
Deliver me from the snares of the enemy
by the power of Blood shed at Calvary
and empower me,
through the water of the Word
and the anointing of the Holy Spirit,
to live a victorious life,*

Summary of the Outer Courts

*pleasing to my God.
For I hereby repent of my sins
and receive You as my Lord and Savior.
In the Name of Jesus Christ I bless You.
Amen.*

I have found the Lord will honor a prayer like this when said from a sincere heart. I would ask you to pause at this time and wait on the Lord. After all, you have just asked Him to forgive your sins and fill you with the Spirit, give Him a few moments to make His way into the depths of your temple.

HE WILL RESCUE ME

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He's my sword, my strength, my shield;

in Him alone I have the victory.

He has made a spectacle of satan's scheme.

He has risen from the dead,

and so I know that He will rescue me!

The cords of sin and death entangled 'round my feet;

the rising tides of fear were drowning me.

In my distress, I cried out to the living God,

and from His hill, He spoke, the Word that set me free!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He's my sword, my strength, my shield;

in Him alone I have the victory.

He has made a spectacle of satan's scheme.

He has risen from the dead,

and so I know that He will rescue me!

We walk by faith and not by what our eyes can see;

our hope is grounded in the barren cave.

We will embrace the race

that has been ordained for us.

We will press on until we reach the final Day.

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He's my sword, my strength, my shield;

in Him alone I have the victory.

He has made a spectacle of satan's scheme.

*He has risen from the dead,
and so I know that He will rescue me!*

Sing, "Hallelujah!" Glorify the risen King!

Sing, "Hallelujah!" Glorify His Name!

Lift up your hands and praise Him for your deliverance;
lift up your voice; proclaim the power of His Name!
Lift up your voice; proclaim the power of His Name!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He's my sword, my strength, my shield;

in Him alone I have the victory.

He has made a spectacle of satan's scheme.

He has risen from the dead,

and so I know that He will rescue me!

They who wait on Yahweh shall renew their strength;
they will run and not grow faint.

They will mount up and soar above on eagle's wings.

They will arise in Christ and never be ashamed!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He's my sword, my strength, my shield;

in Him alone I have the victory.

He has made a spectacle of satan's scheme.

He has risen from the dead,

and so I know that He will rescue me!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

I will sing unto the Lord for He will rescue me!

He will rescue me!

*I will meet the people of Israel there, in the place
made holy by my glorious presence. Yes, I will
consecrate the Tabernacle and the altar, and I will
consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests.
Then I will live among the people of Israel
and be their God.*

Exodus 29:43-45 (NLT)



*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter
the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new
and living way opened for us through the curtain, that
is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the
house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere
heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts
sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and
having our bodies washed with pure water.*

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV)

IV.

The Inner Courts

When we leave the Outer Courts, everything changes. We enter a whole new world. After passing from the blazing sunlight into a darkened, shaded environment, as our eyes adjust, we find ourselves standing in a small room, lined with ornately decorated linens, where flickering lamps illumine and reflect the pure gold of the Lampstand, Table of Showbread, and the second altar of the Tabernacle, the Altar of Incense.

The very essence of our ministry has changed as well. Here, we have no need to be restored, cleansed or forgiven; indeed, no need to receive any ministry whatsoever. We are no longer preoccupied with our own ministries, but become consumed with His. There is nothing more for us here. It's all about Him. In a sense, you might say, we have been converted; converted from "me" to "He."

Welcome to the Tent of Meeting!

The Tent of Meeting

The Tent of Meeting is some fifteen feet high. It is completely enclosed by thick wondrously decorated curtains, linens, and animal skins. About two-thirds of the way back is another curtain. That back room is known as the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies.

This first room of the Tent of Meeting, or the Holy Place, has no natural light. Its only source of illumination is the seven oil lamps sitting atop the Golden Lampstand.

It is bordered on the sides by forty-eight planks of wood-based gold and ornately decorated with linens rich in color and design. The curtains rise up the sides and across the top of the tent, supported by two sets of columns, fifteen feet high.

The majority of the one ton of gold used in the construction of the Tabernacle lies within this small room. The Golden Lampstand (to the left, and parallel to the wall) is made of pure, sculptured gold. Both the Table of Showbread (to the right) and the second altar, the Altar of Incense (up against the curtain leading into the Holy of Holies), are made of acacia wood and covered with hammered gold.

The room reeks of royalty, and rightfully so. We have moved closer to the King of Creation. By virtue of having passed through the first set of columns, through the veil, and into this room, we have crossed an enormous threshold; a threshold that, in my mind, carries the significance of "conversion."

We have been invited to serve, by God's grace, in the courts of the King.

YOU ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE

Come, fill this temple with Your presence;
come, fill this temple with Your praise;
come, breathe upon these fiery pillars,
in the power of Your Name.

O Holy Wind blow through this temple;
forgive and cleanse me with Your grace.

I am Your holy habitation;
purify me in Your Name.

Jesus,

Jesus,

Jesus, You are welcome in this place.

Sweet tongues of fire fall upon us;
shake the foundations of this place.

Stir up a passion for the nations,
for every tongue and tribe and race.

Jesus,

Jesus,

Jesus, You are welcome in this place.

You are welcome in this place.

*You
are welcome
in this place.*

"Make a lampstand of pure, hammered gold. Make the entire lampstand and its decorations of one piece—the base, center stem, lamp cups, buds, and petals. Make it with six branches going out from the center stem, three on each side. Each of the six branches will have three lamp cups shaped like almond blossoms, complete with buds and petals. Craft the center stem of the lampstand with four lamp cups shaped like almond blossoms, complete with buds and petals. There will also be an almond bud beneath each pair of branches where the six branches extend from the center stem. The almond buds and branches must all be of one piece with the center stem, and they must be hammered from pure gold. Then make the seven lamps for the lampstand, and set them so they reflect their light forward. The lamp snuffers and trays must also be made of pure gold. You will need seventy-five pounds of pure gold for the lampstand and its accessories. Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."

Exodus 25:31-40 (NLT)



"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house."

Matthew 5:14-15 (NLT)

A. The Golden Lampstand

Rising from the sandy floor of the Tent of Meeting was a lampstand that looked much like our modern day menorah. It was just over three feet high and made of pure gold with beautifully sculptured flowers, blooms, and buds decorating its main shaft and its three vine-like arms, to either side.

Resting atop each arm, or branch, of the Lampstand were seven lamps. They burned “through the night” and illuminated the Holy Place with enough light for the priests to carry out their ministry. There were also tongs, clippers, and other utensils which aided the priests in the trimming of the lamps near the base. The lamps, sitting atop the seven golden vines of the Lampstand, provided the only light in the Tent of Meeting. All ministry took place under the light of these oil lamps.

Branches, Wood, and Vines

Isaiah writes with regard to the coming Messiah, “In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious...” (Isaiah 4:2 [NIV]). Other prophets describe Christ in tree-like symbols as well. Jeremiah declared the Messiah, rising from the lineage of David, as a righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5 and Zechariah 3:8). The well-known passage from Isaiah, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1 [NIV]), is read often at Christmas. (I have often reflected on the interesting fact that Jesus, the Branch of Heaven, entered into the world on a wooden manger and left the world on a wooden cross – both objects symbolizing the hard “wooden ways” of this fallen world. Indeed, the world was not His friend.)

Additionally, Jesus said, "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]).

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)

Jesus stands majestically in the midst of the world as the Light of the World (John 8:12, 9:5).

Additionally, He speaks of us, the church, as being lifted high, like lamps burning, "giving light to everyone in the house" (Matthew 5:15b [NIV]).

So here we see an amazing picture of Jesus and his relationship to the branches. We can do many things without abiding in Him. Yet none of it will last. But, as we remain grafted to Him (Romans 11:16-24) and His Word, our works will take on eternal significance. In addition, we can ask whatever we want and it will be given to us (John 15:7). God wants to bear fruit through us – fruit that will last – but our fruit is only as enduring as our connectedness in Christ.

Shining Stars

Let us now turn our gaze to the oil lamps. Atop each "branch" of the Golden Lampstand was an oil lamp. The seven lamps were made of clay and filled with pure virgin olive oil which burned through a wick.

In the lamps we find a vivid illustration of the "lighted" witness and ministry of the Body of Christ in the darkened world. Scripture tells us that we are essentially jars of clay ("clay" symbolizes our humanness which was formed from mud and given life by God. See Genesis 2:7).

Paul writes, "We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This

makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7 [NLT]).

Beautiful, isn't it? Whether or not Paul is reflecting upon the symbols found in the Tabernacle of Moses, we can't be sure. Yet he does equate us with clay lamps, made from the earth (Genesis 1) and filled with the treasure of the Holy Spirit, which is often referred to as "oil" in Scripture.

Later in his life, Paul wrote to the church at Philippians that we are shining stars in the midst of a darkened (remember the Tent of Meeting was a dark place with no natural light), "crooked and perverse generation" (Philippians 2:15 [NKJV]).

Thus, we are reflectors of God's majestic glory, the glory of the Vine. The end result is that the world would see God burning through us, and they would know that this power is not from ourselves.

*But if we are living in the light,
as God is in the light,
then we have fellowship with each other,
and the blood of Jesus, his Son,
cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7 (NLT)

Trimming the Wicks

One of the duties of the priest was to trim the wicks of each oil lamp. He had special utensils – scissors, tongs, cloths, etc. – which he used for the task. It was also his responsibility to keep the lamps filled with oil.

When the priest came to a lamp which was low on oil, he'd fill it. In a similar way, one of Jesus' activities is to baptize, or fill us, with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, writing about the ministry of Jesus, said, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" (Mark 1:8 [NLT]).

When the priest came to a lamp that was barely burning he'd take the tweezers and tug on the wick a bit, just enough to get it in the open and seen. If the wicks were too long, the priest would take the clippers and trim them back. The idea was that each lamp would burn a high-intensity white-hot flame, as they were made to do. This was to assure that the Golden Lampstand would shine into the room as a united, single light, and that the priest would have enough light to perform ministry.

The lamps themselves were never made to burn. The flames were designed to burn off the olive oil which burned *through* the wicks. This is a beautiful illustration of the role of the Holy Spirit, burning through the lives of Spirit-filled Christians, for the world to see.

This is a valuable lesson for those of us involved in ministry, as we tend to "burn ourselves out" by doing God's ministry in our own strength, and not in the abiding fuel of the Spirit. The results produce a community of tired saints who are filled with the soot of resentment and bitterness in about everything they do. I'm reminded of a poem that goes like this:

*Mary had a little lamb
A tender happy sheep
One day it gave its life to Christ
And died for lack of sleep.*

That's what happens when we forget that this is all about "He" – all about Him - and He is faithful to provide the internal resource of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish the thing He has called us to do. We die for lack of sleep!

As the priest examined the wicks, he could immediately ascertain how, and if, the lamps were burning. Like the priests of old, the Vinedresser, who is the Father, sees our potential and prunes us accordingly. This pruning naturally involves the clipping of attitudes, judgments, pride, and other obstacles in our wicks that could prevent us from burning pure for His ministry.

God trims us and we should expect Him to do that. He will “tug” us or “clip” us – all depending on what is needed.

For example, sometimes people are hesitant to get into ministry. They think they’re not educated enough, not good enough, not ready yet, not sinless enough. In these situations, we may not realize that our well-thought, clever arguments (i.e., procrastination) keeping us from doing ministry are actually holding Him up from the things He has planned – not for you, per se’, but for someone else!

In a case like this, He may suddenly “pull you – tug you” into a ministry without giving you time to really think about it. You may be approached by someone at church who will present a need that you could not only fill, but would really enjoy doing so. Consider that the work of the Vinedresser who is pulling you out so that you would shine all the brighter. It’s a good thing!

It works the other way as well.

There are occasions where our wicks burn out of control. We are filled with pride, lust, impure thoughts or behaviors which are the equivalent to hiding our light under a bushel. The results are a lot of smoke and little light.

In this case, Jesus, the Great High Priest and Vinedresser, will lovingly trim us back so that we would burn in sync with the rest of the lamps, the Body of Christ.

In Scripture, this trimming is called the discipline of the Lord. It usually happens through situations, events, or people who impact us in such a way that we are humbled. It is through that humility that we are gently brought back to our first love, and re-filled with the gentleness and ever-loving purposes of the Lord.

As a young man I spent about a year living and working in Kibbutz in Israel. I was in my early twenties, recently converted, and ablaze with the fire of God. (Being “ablaze with the fire of God” is a wonderful thing – I still am! – yet being ablaze with the fire of God without having *the wisdom of the Lord* can be quite smoldering indeed!)

In those days I prided myself upon being a quick punster. I was “off the charts” with my witty, joke-telling, and always-needing-to-have-the-last-laugh slippery tongue. Humor in its purest form is wonderful. But, my humor was biting in nature; sarcastic to the extent that I no longer cared about the impact my humor would have on others, only that I got people laughing. I was in a dangerous place.

One day I was with some young adults at the Jerusalem bus station, waiting to take a trip. We were joking around as usual. I was in rare form, performing and making jabs at everyone around me. I was thoroughly impressing everyone, including myself.

However, there was a woman there who wasn’t as impressed. She was probably about twenty years old, or so. She just stood there, leaning up against a concrete column, watching me. She didn’t even crack a smile. I noted that and poured it on all the more. I pulled out all my stops in my efforts to make her laugh.

It didn’t work.

During an unplanned pause in my ever-so-clever monologue, she pulled herself away from the post and approached me. She was from Holland and I can remember both her broken English accent and the intense look of righteous anger in her eyes like it was yesterday.

“You think you are very funny, don’t you?”

I remained silent, but inwardly agreed with her position. “Sure, perhaps she is right.”

“Well, you are not.”

I stopped dead.

She continued, “You may think that your jokes and your sarcasm are funny. But they are not. It is grievous to me and to the Lord. He is not amused by what you have to say.”

I was immediately humbled. She was right. And I knew it. I apologized and thanked her. I sat on that bus in silence for a long time, examining the looseness of my tongue and the power of the Holy Spirit impacting my heart. The last thing I would ever want to do is to grieve the Lord – or grieve one of His children.

That incident is definitive as to what it means to be “trimmed” by the Vinedresser. It was as if Jesus saw me burning out of control – so much so that the room was filled with a “Bill-stench” and not the sweet fragrance of God – and He reached slowly for the clippers. Using a sweet, sincere voice of a sister in the Lord, He trimmed me into a place where He could really shine through me.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

John 15:1-2 (NIV)

Through the years I have been trimmed many times and will always be trimmed, too. And I bless God for that. It reminds me that He still cares and that He still loves me.

The writer of Hebrews says it best: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines [trims the wicks of] those He loves, and punishes everyone He accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons [and daughters]. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Hebrews 12:5b-7 [NIV]).

A Global Witness

After the priest trimmed the wicks, the entire Lampstand gave off a unified illumination which, though consisting of seven lamps, shone as only one light.

This is a powerful symbol of the world-wide church and its uniform witness to the world of God's love and presence.

Jesus loves His church and prays for us all the time. He walks among us. He is known to walk in the midst of the Golden Lampstand (Revelation 1:12, 13, 20, and 2:1), which means He is maintaining the witness of the Body of Christ worldwide. He is concerned we remain unified, "that they may all be one," giving glory to the Father in the world (John 17:20-24). One of the amazing things about the Body of Christ is that you can go anywhere in the world and the same Holy Spirit that is burning through the saints in Uganda is burning through the saints in Texas. Almost anywhere you go in the world there will be Christians. And they are all illuminating their neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, and nations with the same Light of Christ! This, in itself, is a powerful witness to the reality of the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

Tongues of Fire

The lamps atop the Golden Lampstand are also parabolic of the "tongues of fire" which alighted atop the heads of the 120 followers of Christ in the Upper Room (Acts 2:3). The fire of the Spirit blazed through the room like a mighty wind and rested atop each one there. The result was that the glory of the Lord burned in their hearts and within a few weeks thousands and thousands of people bore witness to the amazing work of God in Jesus Christ.

Before we move across the room to the Table of Showbread, I invite you to place this book aside, close your eyes, and allow the Lord to fill

your imagination with the scenes around the Golden Lampstand. Picture yourself standing before the menorah; note its magnificent sculpturing of buds and flowers, their reflections in the lamp light.

Then take note of the lamps. See their brightness. Consider their unity. As you reflect, ask God if there are areas in your heart needing trimming; areas needing to be brought out, or areas needing to be cut back.

Ask Him to do that.

He is the Vinedresser, your Father in Heaven, who loves you. Why not give Him access to your heart, here and now in this time of quietness and safety?

PSALM 18:28

You, O Lord,
keep my lamp burning.
My God, turns my darkness
into light;
into light.

"Then make a table of acacia wood, 36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 27 inches high. Overlay it with pure gold and run a gold molding around the edge. Decorate it with a 3-inch border all around, and run a gold molding along the border. Make four gold rings for the table and attach them at the four corners next to the four legs. Attach the rings near the border to hold the poles that are used to carry the table. Make these poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. Make special containers of pure gold for the table—bowls, pans, pitchers, and jars—to be used in pouring out liquid offerings. Place the Bread of the Presence on the table to remain before me at all times."

Exodus 25:23-30 (NLT)



"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

John 6:51 (NLT)

B. The Golden Table of Showbread

Located just across from the Golden Lampstand and not more than seven feet away, was what has become known as the Table of Showbread. This was a small wooden table, covered with hammered gold and measuring one and a half feet wide and three feet from end to end. It had a golden rim, or crown, around its table top.

Lying on the Table were twelve loaves of pita-shaped bread which were laid out, most likely, in two standing columns, "showing" the bread in the light of the oil lamps; thus, it was called the "Table of Showbread."

Each day, bread was laid atop the Table of Showbread. This speaks to the fact that Jesus is continuously before the throne of the Father. The priests' duties included exchanging out the old bread and refurbishing the Table with new bread, thereby assuring all breads lying before the Lord were fresh. As the priests worked the Table together, they exchanged the old bread with the new, most likely having conversation and enjoying fellowship around the Table.

You will see almost immediately where Jesus can be found at this ministry station. Here are a couple of illustrations:

Holy Communion

Jesus is perhaps most clearly seen in the Table with regard to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus is the self-described "Bread of Life" and states that anyone who eats "this bread" would live forever (John 6:51).

Back then, the priests were the only ones who ate the bread. Today, of course, under the New Covenant, we have all been declared priests unto God (Revelation 1:6). Thus, in our desert pilgrimage, we gather at the Table of Showbread for nourishment, sustenance, and fellowship.

During the forty years in the desert, God supernaturally provided food for His children with the supernatural food of angels. "Manna," as it was called, was a mysterious food which tasted a bit like the coriander seed. The word "manna" literally means, "what is it?"

Each morning God provided just enough manna to make it through the day. It laid all about the ground to be gathered. When the Israelites woke, they would go out to gather the flakey substance off the ground, then bring it back to the campsite where it would be ground, fried, and prepared in numerous ways to be eaten. God was faithful to feed the Israelites the manna each day of their journey. When the sun rose above a certain height (or perhaps when the temperature rose too high), the manna was rendered useless. So the Israelites had to get up very early each day and collect it before it got too hot.

This is an illustration of having a quiet time each morning, a time to commune with the Bread of Life before the cares of the world kick in and melt away our precious time with the Lord.

A daily provisions-worth of manna was provided each day, except on Friday. On Friday, a double portion of manna was collected, one for Friday and the other for Saturday. This was God's assistance in helping the Israelites to take a day off and not work on the Sabbath.

As the manna sustained the Hebrews in their journey through the desert, so does the Sacrament of Holy Communion sustain us in our walks with Christ. Communion empowers us, gives us hope, and reminds us what this journey is all about.

Many times when giving Communion, I will hand the piece of bread to the communicant and say, "The Bread of Heaven; food for the journey."

In addition, there were also special times when offerings of wine were brought to the Table of Showbread with the bread. To our knowledge, the wine was always poured out into the desert floor before the Lord (Numbers 28:7). Nevertheless, this ministry station has strong themes of Holy Communion.

Through the years I have learned that the Sacrament of Communion is not to be taken lightly. In our Episcopal tradition, we take Communion about every time we meet. That's a real double-edged sword. While we have learned to rely on it for our own spiritual welfare, if we're not careful, our familiarity with the Sacrament can devalue its virtue. It needs to be remembered that the priests of old had been forgiven at the Altar of Sacrifice and cleansed at the Laver before approaching the Table and eating its bread.

Fellowship

When I was in Israel, I was at a church one Saturday when the Pastor shared that we were going to have Communion – but we were going to have it, in his words, "the way they used to do it in the early church." The instructions went something like this:

"We're going to pass around this big basket of bread. When it gets to you, break off a large piece of it and pass the basket to your neighbor. Then, I want you to sit back, eat your bread, and have fellowship with the brother or sister sitting next to you. Ask them what God is doing in their lives, share with them your struggles, and pray for one another. If you need more bread, just ask for it. But, through it all, I want you to have genuine, Christian fellowship, both with Christ and with one another."

And so it was. We blessed the bread, grabbed a chunk, and had fellowship around the breaking of the bread. It was beautiful. By the end of forty-five minutes, people were laughing with each other, crying with each other, and praying for each other. We were having true fellowship at the Table of Showbread.

The Greek word for fellowship, *koinonia*, far exceeds casual friendship. It is the mingling in the presence of God and the sharing with one another. This type of fellowship is surrounded by and affirmed in the Spirit. In true *koinonia*, people can sense God and the miracle He has wrought in the person with whom they are sharing. It is much more than catching up on things. It is the experience of spiritual relationship with a brother or sister through the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, it is oftentimes energizing, joyful, with the essence of heaven laced therein. This is a level of relationship that is unknown to anyone who is not a Christian. The activities of the church as described in Acts 2:42 reflect what true *koinonia* looks like in the real world.

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.
Acts 2:42 (NLT)

But even *koinonia* can be abused.

The good folks at the church of Corinth knew all about that. Not only did they add wine to the fellowship hour (which, in itself isn't bad, as Jesus told us to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him. [See Matthew 26:26 and John 6:53f]), but they had taken it past the outer limits. They were getting drunk at church.

Paul would later write to the church at Ephesus, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18 [NIV]). Seems like drunkenness was a problem with the early saints, whether affiliated with Communion wine or not.

Not a good thing.

Paul came down hard on the church at Corinth and admonished them in a huge way. He told them they needed to examine themselves before taking Communion. He also mentioned that if they made light of the Lord's Supper, they would drink judgment upon themselves, perhaps even dying as a result of their Sacramental flippancy. (See 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 for some sobering thoughts around our attitudes when receiving Communion.)

Beverly, my wife, was raised in the Dutch Reformed tradition. They didn't take Communion very often but, when they did, *they took Communion*. Three weeks out the Pastor would say, "In three weeks we will be having Communion. Prepare your hearts." Two weeks out he would say, "In two weeks time we'll be participating in the Lord's Supper. Prepare your hearts." A week before Communion would happen, he would say the same. The result was when they had Communion, people were ready; they had been to the Laver and prepared their hearts to the best of their ability. They took Holy Communion seriously, in a manner worthy of the life and death of our Lord Jesus.

Known By the Scars

Another interesting thing about this ministry station has to do with the bread itself.

For starters, there were twelve loaves, or cakes, of bread lying atop the golden, crown-rimmed Table of Showbread. The number twelve is loaded with symbolism throughout the Bible: twelve sons of Jacob, twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve gates to the New Jerusalem.

The priests were instructed to pierce the bread prior to a fiery baking and being placed on the Golden Table (Leviticus 24:5). This is directly linked to the death of Christ who, unlike the manna given in the desert (John 6:49), is the true Bread that comes down from heaven. He

was pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 22:16).

You may recall that when Jesus had been crucified, the guards had been ordered to get the bodies off the crosses by sundown so not to offend the Jewish law (which is quite absurd if you think about it: the Law was offended in that they had just murdered someone!). They came to Jesus and found that He was already dead. But, just to make sure, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water, like the blood and water in the Outer Courts.

But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

John 19:33-34 (NIV)

When Jesus rose again from the fiery furnace and returned to heaven, He returned with the scars of His redemptive work; specifically piercings from the crucifixion in His hands, feet, and side, for all eternity to see. Like the bread at the Table of Showbread, Jesus was first pierced with a sharp object(s), and then baked in the fires of Hell before being laid out on the marble table-like bed of the empty tomb.

When He returns, those same scars will be one of the first things seen. In fact, the Jewish people, when they see their Messiah will look upon "the One they have pierced and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son" (Zechariah 12:10 [NIV]).

"If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' He will answer, 'The wounds I was given in the house of my friends.'" (Zechariah 13:6 [NIV]).

There is something so tenderly revealing about this passage of Scripture which makes me cry every time I read it. Here, He is showing the scars of crucifixion that they gave Him; He shows them without

bitterness or judgment, only proof of His enduring love for them. God's love reaches out to them, and us, through the scars to all who have been scarred and pierced by the sin of the world.

We will all see His wounds one day, in the body of the returning Lord which will, no doubt, be grievous to many. But, until then, we have the prophetic piercing of the twelve loaves of bread that lay before God Almighty on the Table of Showbread, a startling foreshadowing which endures into this day and age.

*Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn
because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.
Revelation 1:7 (NIV)*

Royalty

Jesus was fully God and fully man. The make-up of the Table of Showbread, as well as the following ministry stations, reveals this in a powerful way. The Table of Showbread, Altar of Incense, and the Ark of the Covenant are all made from acacia wood and covered with gold. Wood is a symbol of humanity, while gold is a symbol of royalty.

Even in the construction of the Tabernacle of Moses, we see vivid foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! I bless God for Moses' obedience to build the Tabernacle according to the pattern given him. While he may have wondered about some of the specifics of the blueprints (piercing of the bread, make-up of the stations), he completed the project out of obedience. I can't wait to meet him!

Also built into the construction of the ministry station were two "crowns of gold," which rose above the flattened surface and outlined the Table. The two crowns speak to the two natures of Jesus, fully man and fully God. The first crown was given at His death: a crown of thorns. The

second crown is a glorious crown of gold which adorns Him today as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

I PREPARE MY HEART

I prepare my heart,
I prepare my mind,
to receive the precious flesh and blood,
in bread and wine.

Poured out on the Cross,
nourishing my soul,
is my Lord and Savior Christ who died,
and makes me whole.

Is my Lord and Savior Christ who died,
and makes me whole;
make me whole.

"Then make another altar of acacia wood for burning incense. Make it 18 inches square and 36 inches high, with horns at the corners carved from the same piece of wood as the altar itself. Overlay the top, sides, and horns of the altar with pure gold, and run a gold molding around the entire altar. Make two gold rings, and attach them on opposite sides of the altar below the gold molding to hold the carrying poles. Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Place the incense altar just outside the inner curtain that shields the Ark of the Covenant, in front of the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—that covers the tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. I will meet with you there."

Exodus 30:1-6 (NLT)



"And when He took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people."

Revelation 5:8 (NLT)

C. The Golden Altar of Incense

At this point we need to briefly look back to where we began. Where we began has everything to do with where we are now. Try to recall the stations and symbols as we regress:

- ❖ We have seen Jesus and tasted the sweetness of koinonia at the Table of Showbread.
- ❖ We have seen His glorious reflection as the Light of the World, shining through His Church in the lamps beaming across the Golden Lampstand.
- ❖ We slip from the cool shadows of the Inner Courts into the blaring daylight of the Outer Courts where we appropriated Christ's ministry of Water and Blood at the deepest levels of our souls.
- ❖ We received cleansing and empowerment from Living Water at the Laver and have been cleansed from spiritual soot through the sanctification of the Spirit.
- ❖ We have received complete forgiveness of our sins and have been redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb at the ever-gruesome Altar of Sacrifice.

Two Altars

This is where we need to begin, here at the outside Altar of Sacrifice, in order to approach the inner Altar of Incense.

The two altars of the Tabernacle provide necessary tension and balance in the overall scheme of things. Both altars are needed to get into the coveted Holy of Holies. Below is a table illustrating the fascinating

differences and similarities between the two altars. I invite you to linger here for a moment.

The Two Altars in the Tabernacle of Moses

	Altar of Sacrifice	Altar of Incense
Location	Outer Court	Inner Court
Size	Largest	Smallest
Materials	Wood and Brass	Wood and Gold
Purpose	Atonement	Prayer
Ministry	For my behalf	For His behalf
Scents	Burning animals	Burning incense
Energy	Aggressive work	Gentle ease
Other	Public in Light	Private in Darkness
Commonalities	Blood, smoke, and fire	

My Father's House - A House of Prayer

Now let's leave the noon-day heat and slip again into the Tent of Meeting. Your eyes adjust. To the left is the Golden Lampstand, providing you with light to see; to the right, the Table of Showbread. Directly before you on the sand and at the base of a thick veil of royal hues is the Altar, its golden sides shimmering under the dancing lights of the gold menorah. A perpetual outflow of scented incense rises from the miniature fire-pit, filling the room with other-worldly, exotic fragrances before being absorbed into the fabric ceiling, curtains and hanging linens.

This is the smallest piece of furniture in the Tabernacle of Moses, and the most important. For it is the station of prayer and intercession.

Its location certainly speaks to this. It's the closest ministry to the Ark of the Covenant, seated at the very heart of the Temple.

You may recall Jesus became enraged at the way people were disrespecting the Temple (that would have been Herod's temple). He became indignant and turned over kiosks, sent birds and goats scurrying, and violently proclaimed that no human institution – moneychangers, chief priests, scribes or otherwise – could prohibit people from having access to their Father. This event is described in John 2:13-22 and Matthew 21:12-17.

At the climax of His rage He proclaimed, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of 'robbers'" (Matthew 21:13 [NIV]).

God so longs for us to draw near to Him through prayer by the Blood of Jesus and still is upset when seekers are kept from drawing near to Him, especially in the name of "the Church." Throughout history we have been famous for setting up barriers between God and His children. Jesus came to tear down the barriers, not construct them.

*"These I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations."
Isaiah 56:7 (NIV)*

The Bible says that, as Jesus gave up His spirit, the veil which divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was ripped in half (Matthew 27:51), signifying there were no more man-made barriers between the Creator and His creation. That's why we are invited to "come boldly to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16 [NKJV]).

Smaller is Bigger

Drawing nearer and peering down into the center of the altar, a couple of things capture our attention.

First, it is tiny, the smallest ministry station in the Tabernacle, which may speak to the fact that humility is a key component as one approaches the Lord in prayer. Measuring a mere eighteen inches square and standing only a few feet high, it stands in stark contrast to the first Altar (of Sacrifice), which was a whopping 7 feet square and 4½ feet tall.

Only By the Blood

Secondly, you'll notice a smudge of blood there: a dried droplet smeared across the altar's golden crown. The blood was placed there by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement and taken from an animal which was sacrificed for the sins of the people. It signifies that our ministry happens solely through the Blood of the Lamb.

A Strange Fire?

Smoldering embers lie at the base of the altar. You may remember this is the same fire which fell from heaven when the temple was consecrated, back on Dedication Day. On that occasion, holy fire and the flames were used to ignite all fires in the Temple. God provided the means through which the priests were to carry on their ministry.

This fire is illustrative of the flames that fell at Pentecost upon the heads of the disciples. Through the years, this same flame has burned through the hearts of millions upon millions of faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly enough, God was adamant about the fires fueling worship at the Tabernacle, accepting only those flames which He alone

had initiated. While “flames” from other sources may have been more convenient or practical (flames from nearby campfires or refuse dumps, for example), they were considered “strange fires” and an abomination before the Lord (Exodus 30:9).

The sons of Aaron presumed to bring a fire of their own making before the Lord and were immediately killed for doing so (Leviticus 10:1-3) – and they were High Priests! It didn’t matter to God who they were, or to whom they were related. All that mattered is that the ministry performed unto the Lord had to be exercised within the obedience “of the Lord,” or it would be rejected.

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

Leviticus 10:1-2 (NIV)

This speaks in a powerful and prophetic manner to the modern-day church. In our day, there are many who seek to minister to God through so-called “progressive theology”, politically correct doctrine, or protocols less than what God has established from the beginning. These are fires of man’s imagination, not of God’s initiation.

Whenever this type of ministry is attempted – when a “strange fire” is brought before the Lord – we can be thankful for God’s mercy which triumphs over judgment (James 2:13b). In our day and age, He doesn’t strike us dead, yet the fruit of our ministry becomes useless, soured, and dead.

I think of this when I consider the rise and fall of church movements and their leaders throughout the history of Christianity. Denominations which sway away from Orthodoxy and seek to introduce non-Biblical methods in their approach to the holiness of God are plagued by division, inner turmoil, and confusion. Through time they sour, wither and fade away.

While I am aware of these trends in most American main-stream denominations, I am most saddened with the “sway away” within my own Episcopal Church, the church wherein I have been called to serve. In our church there is a general lack of intentional faithfulness to the “original fire” once received. New “progressive, culturally sensitive” teachings are being introduced which run against the grain of Biblical Orthodoxy. The offering of these “strange fires” unto the Lord have taken their toll. We are shrinking dramatically and plagued with all manner of division. This is a vivid reminder that the bringing of strange fires before the Lord actually alienates us from the very life, vibrancy, and intimacy we so earnestly desire; something which is found only in the holiness of God.

Our church leaders shouldn't be fooled: it is the mercy and longsuffering of our Lord which is holding back the judgment of the Almighty. We think that just because “nothing has happened to us” God must be pleased – perhaps even approving – with our strange escapades. But nothing could be further from the Truth. God doesn't appreciate what He doesn't initiate – never has; never will. It is the loving mercy of Jesus that shields us. He is there, time and time again, praying for the day when we finally come to our senses.

Holy Smoke!

The psalmist writes, “May my prayer be set before You like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:2 [NIV]).

A wonderful, precisely-measured mixture of incense (gum, resin, onycha, stacte, galbanum, and pure frankincense) burned within the golden walls of the Altar of Incense. The incense itself was to be “salted and pure and sacred” (Exodus 30:34-38). Its fragrance rose from the altar and filled the Holy Place with a mystical, other-worldly fragrance

which, no doubt, permeated the curtains, veils, and ceilings – indeed, even the garments worn by the priest – with its rich, musky aromas.

These aromas speak to the sweetness of the saints. We all know people who linger for hours in prayer and intercession before the Lord. Don't you love being around them? There is something beautiful about these people. They have – for lack of a better word – a "fragrance" about them that can't be hidden.

I can tell when people have been fellowshiping with God through prayer at the Altar of Incense. They just smell good!

I think those outside the walls of the church smell it, too. Christians have "aromas," which others can sense with their spiritual sniffers. They may not be able to articulate it as such, but there is "something" about a person who has spent time lingering in prayer at the Altar of Incense. Likewise, when our fragrances need "spicing up," so to speak, they can sense that as well (another reason to stay away from strange fire!).

Paul says it like this: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the fragrance of death; to the other, the fragrance of life" (2 Corinthians 2:14-16 [NIV]).

YOU ARE WISDOM

You are the God of the plans of man;
place Your desires within us.
Give us Your wisdom, Your vision, Your dreams;
fill us with grace from above.

*You are Wisdom,
speak on the corners;
Vision,
in faith we will ride.
You are dreaming
of when we will finish
the plans You have laid in our hearts.*

Bless and unite us on this holy trail,
in Jesus' Name we pray.
And when we're finished our praises will rise
to the Truth, and the Life, and the Way.

*You are Wisdom,
speak on the corners;
Vision,
in faith we will ride.
You are dreaming
of when we will finish
the plans You have laid in our hearts.*

Bless and unite us on this holy trail,
in Jesus' Name we pray.

Jeshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel. So the angel said to the others standing there, "Take off his filthy clothes." And turning to Jeshua he said, "See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes."

Then I said, "They should also place a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean priestly turban on his head and dressed him in new clothes while the angel of the Lord stood by.

Then the angel of the Lord spoke very solemnly to Jeshua and said, "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: If you follow my ways and carefully serve me, then you will be given authority over my Temple and its courtyards. I will let you walk among these others standing here.

Zechariah 3:3-7 (NLT)



Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 1:5-6 (NIV)

D. Summary of the Inner Courts

We have experienced God's majesty in the Inner Courts, the glorious Golden Lampstand which illuminates the light of Christ from the sculptured Vine; the crowned Table of Showbread which is an eternal memorial to the Living Bread of Life and the King of Kings; and the Father's fragrance which can only be known as one lingers in the Spirit and lifts up sweet prayers to God.

This was a wonderful place to minister. A priest could linger here for hours at a time, completely engaged with the mysteries surrounding him. Here is where the priest served. This is where he discovered his ministry. This is where he sacrificially offered back all that the Glorious One had offered him, back in the Outer Courts. Every action, every preparation, every prayer could only be described as sacramental.

*How lovely is
your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!*

*My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.*

*Even the sparrow
has found a home,
and the swallow
a nest for herself,
where she may have
her young—
a place near your altar,
O LORD Almighty,
my King and my God.*

*Blessed are those
who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.
Selah*

*Better is one day
in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a
doorkeeper in the house
of my God
than dwell in the tents
of the wicked.*

Psalm 84:1-4, 10 (NIV)

No More Turning Back

At this point in the Progression, it was commonplace for the priest to take a final glance at the Altar of Incense, look over the bread at the Table of

Showbread, and revere the Golden Lampstand one last time before turning around, and leaving the tranquil beauty of the Holy Place for the harsh desert-environment of the Outer Courts.

Of course there was yet another room to enter, a deeper place of ministry. But it was concealed by a magnificently decorated hanging veil. Only one person had the privilege of entering into the Most Holy Place. That was reserved for the High Priest alone – and even then, it happened only once a year.

We know, of course, from Scripture, all that has changed. The moment Christ was crucified, it says the thirty foot high veil of Herod's temple was torn in half. This supernatural tearing forever grants us (who are spiritual priests called by God to offer spiritual sacrifices) access to God anytime of the day or night.

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

Matthew 27:50-51 (NIV)

It's wonderful to know God isn't content with his priests having to come "this far" and then having to turn away. He likes us. He beckons us deeper. The invitation to draw near to the Throne of Grace is never ending. What a joy it is to know

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)

we are forever summoned to the courts of the King!

AT THE THRONE OF GRACE

As we move into Your presence,
we offer You a sacrifice of praise;
knowing that our prayers like incense,
will be received at the Throne of Grace.

*And we worship You, worship You.
We stand beside our great High Priest.
Yes, we worship You, worship You,
Almighty God, Yahweh our King.*

Coming to the Holy of Holies,
we tremble at Your Mercy Seat.
Our crowns reflect Shekinah glory,
as we lay them at Your feet.

*And we worship You, worship You.
We stand beside our great High Priest.
Yes, we worship You, worship You,
Almighty God, Yahweh our King.*

"For the inside of the Tabernacle, make a special curtain of finely woven linen. Decorate it with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and with skillfully embroidered cherubim. Hang this curtain on gold hooks attached to four posts of acacia wood. Overlay the posts with gold, and set them in four silver bases. Hang the inner curtain from clasps, and put the Ark of the Covenant in the room behind it. This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place."

Exodus 26:31-33 (NLT)



Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

Revelation 4:1-6a (NLT)

V.

The Holy of Holies

A single curtain marked the division between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. It hung from gold covered columns of wood and was attached with silver hooks. Slipping through the veil and into this Most Holy Place was a sacred and hallowed event.

As mentioned, only the High Priest had access to the Holy of Holies – and that, only once a year. Moses, however, could often be found here, speaking to the Lord, face to face, as a person speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11).

Arriving at the Holy of Holies was a significant event. As we have seen, it took quite a bit of energy to get there. Getting from one end of the Tabernacle to the other wasn't a walk in Eden. It was a well-defined sacrifice of praise. From clothing himself in the morning, to performing his duties at the Tabernacle, to disrobing after returning home, all was done as an intentional consecrating of the priest's entire life and purpose to the work and ministry of Yahweh.

Here, however, in the Holy of Holies, all work ceases.

In the Outer Courts, ministry was all about "me": my forgiveness and my cleansing and so on. In the Holy Place, it was ministry to "He": to His glory, His bread, and His prayers. Here, in our final stage, it is all about "we": meaning, "God and us." Once you arrive here, there is no ministry to do, nothing to achieve, only being with God.

**EXALT THE LORD OUR GOD
(PSALM 99:5)**

Exalt the Lord our God,
worship at His feet,
for the Lord our God, He is holy!
Exalt the Lord our God,
worship at His feet,
for the Lord our God, He is holy!

Lift your voice and sing,
bow before your King,
say unto the nations, "He's holy!"

Holy! Holy!

Say unto the nations, "He is holy!"

Holy! Holy!

Say unto the nations, "He is holy!"

"Have the people make an Ark of acacia wood—a sacred chest 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold, and run a molding of gold all around it. Cast four gold rings and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. Make poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings at the sides of the Ark to carry it. These carrying poles must stay inside the rings; never remove them. When the Ark is finished, place inside it the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you.

Exodus 25:10-16 (NLT)



Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

Hebrews 8:1-2 (NLT)

A. The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was a small box about 4 feet long and 2½ feet across. Like the Table of Showbread and Altar of Incense, it was made of acacia wood, covered with hammered gold, and sported a royal crown of molding around its rim, again pointing to Jesus being fully human and the King of Kings, fully God.

The Ark had three objects stored within its walls: stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, signifying the standards by which God judges His people; Aaron's rod which budded, signifying the miraculous ways God redeems His people; and a pot of manna, signifying God's sure provision for His sojourners as they faithfully followed the cloud into the Promised Land.

These three objects speak strongly of the persons of the Holy Trinity: God as Lawgiver, Holy Spirit as Miracle Worker, and Jesus as the Living Manna and Bread of Life. All three are distinct with different roles and personality; all three cloistered in One unified Embodiment and enthroned here, within the walls of the Ark of the Covenant.

God Has a Plan

Like the majority of the ministry stations in the Tabernacle, the Ark had rings with long staves, or poles, on each side. These staves remained in the rings so that whenever the Shekinah Presence moved, the Levites could rush in, cover the Ark and Mercy Seat with skins, pick it up and follow the cloud to the next place of rest.

Of course, this is a vivid reminder of God's prerogative to move us around as He pleases. God has a plan. He executes that plan with corresponding actions that engage us with those purposes. Like the shepherd who goes ahead of his sheep seeking pastures filled with promise, God has seen our "promised lands" and is all about getting us there. Thus, we are a people on the move.

As the ever-fluid Spirit of Creation, God moves in shadows of turning that we – by virtue of our mortality – can never see or imagine. Yet, He has a plan (which we are to trust). He is engineering all Creation to align herself with the glorious consummation – the Wedding Supper of the Lamb – which will bring us all together at the end of the age.

God in a Box?

In the fictional film ***Raiders of the Lost Ark***, the Ark of the Covenant was coveted for its perceived power. The Nazi's sought to capture the ancient artifact because they thought having it would be like having a genie in a bottle, a magic wand that would grant them anything they wanted.

Biblical history notes the same regrettable error: the Ark of the Covenant was perceived by rival nations to be a supernatural power-box which could be wielded to conform to the power of its possessor. The nations didn't realize the secret of the Israelite's success had nothing to do with the possession of the "magic box", but had everything to do with their continuing obedience to the God of the Ark. All the pagan tribes knew was whenever the Hebrews marched into battle with the Ark, they always got the victory.

Under that misconception, we have the story of the Philistines who stole the Ark from the Hebrews (1 Samuel 5). They succeeded in capturing the Ark, but it wouldn't be long before they would beg the Israelites to take it back. Everywhere they placed the Ark chaos erupted.

Once they brought it to their Temple of Dagon (most likely a fertility god of harvest). Within a few days, the powerful idol had fallen to the floor with its head distanced from its body. On another occasion they brought the Ark into a town where everyone living there got hemorrhoids. It soon became apparent that it may have worked for the Hebrews, but for the Philistines, it was nothing but trouble.

God didn't like being misrepresented as "another god" – or even as our "higher power" – if our motives have to do with manipulation to satisfy our own personal exploits, even if they appear to be good. When the Presence of God is brought into these kinds of places, holy chaos breaks out.

The other, more obvious lesson here is that God cannot be "boxed" into our wills, desires, or future dreams. He is a Free Agent and acts as He pleases. I believe that many are guilty by seeking to use Him as a magic wand: the one who will make me successful, the one who will bring me that perfect man or woman, or the one who will get me where I need to be.

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."*

Revelation 4:11 (NIV)

This is all about Him: His will, His sovereign purposes on Earth, and the glorious destiny awaiting us, with Him.

He is holy – separated, unearthly, sovereign. His mysterious ways are no less.

HOLY, YOU ARE GOD

Holy, You are God;

Holy, You are God.

Who was, and is, and will always be:

Holy, Holy.

Holy, You are God.

Worthy, You are God;

Worthy, You are God.

Who was, and is, and will always be:

Worthy, Worthy.

Worthy, You are God.

Jesus, You are God,

Jesus, You are God.

Who was, and is, and will always be:

Jesus, Jesus.

Jesus, You are God.

Holy, You are God;

Holy, You are God.

Who was, and is, and will always be:

Holy,

Worthy,

Jesus, You are God.

"Then make the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—from pure gold. It must be 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. Then make two cherubim from hammered gold, and place them on the two ends of the atonement cover. Mold the cherubim on each end of the atonement cover, making it all of one piece of gold. The cherubim will face each other and look down on the atonement cover. With their wings spread above it, they will protect it. Place inside the Ark the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you. Then put the atonement cover on top of the Ark. I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel."

Exodus 25:17-22 (NLT)



"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

1 Peter: 2:9-10 (NIV)

B. The Mercy Seat

Resting within the crowned molding of the Ark was the Seat of Mercy. It consisted of a golden lid, about an inch thick, which fit firmly within the crowned rim of the Ark. This was an intriguing, single piece of pure gold. Absolute Divinity!

The seat had two sculptured angels, rising from either side; their wings pointing across the seat and, perhaps, with their wingtips touching at the center of the seat.

While the Mercy Seat appeared to be three separate pieces, the lid and two angels, God was specific in the blueprints to have it built as "one piece." This is a further illustration of the Trinity: one God, three Persons.

The Mercy Seat is, above all else, a seat. While I have found no Scriptures to indicate Moses actually used the Seat as a seat, the significance is not diminished. It is a seat. This speaks to us that we have arrived at a place to stop, a place to linger, a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of the world for some well-deserved peace and quiet.

*"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."*

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

We have arrived into the Sabbath Rest, where all roles and expectations are safely discarded and we can be still and know that He is God.

The Power of Propitiation

Up against the side of the Mercy Seat was a smudge mark of dried blood. The blood was taken from a sacrificed lamb and placed there by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. Similar smears of consecration marked

the sides of the Altar of Incense, Table of Showbread, and other ministry stations in the Tabernacle.

This is a reminder that our worship is only made possible through the Blood of the Lamb – and that God is only accessible through Christ’s propitiatory work at the Altar of Sacrifice (i.e., Calvary). Jesus is the propitiation of our sin.

The word “propitiation” is a theological term meaning to appease, to placate, and to make satisfaction before a holy God. God is righteous and holy. He is the terrible and Almighty Spirit who will judge both the living and the dead on that great and glorious Day. To come before Him without the Lamb’s identification would be spiritual suicide – an act provoking the very judgment of God. Through Christ’s Blood, however, God’s wrath toward sin has been rerouted and thus, we know nothing but His amazing grace and mercy.

The ancient story of the first Passover powerfully illustrates the power of blood, as the angel of death “passed over” (averted judgment) houses marked with the blood of lambs.

Moses writes, “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on *you* to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13 [NKJV]).

I mentioned earlier that I grew up in Cape Canaveral, Florida. We moved there in 1969 and saw everything from monkeys to men and women lift off the launch pad and head into space. In the early days, there was much concern surrounding the heat generated around the outside of the capsules at re-entry. Could the spacecrafts make it through the hellish fires of re-entry or would they disintegrate into fiery fragments?

When John Glenn, the first American to orbit Earth, began his descent in the Mercury 6 capsule, everyone at mission control was glued to

his headset. As expected, all communication “blacked out” between Canaveral and the falling fireball. During that eerie silence, the Earth’s gravity pulled Glenn faster and faster through the atmosphere with tremendous velocity. It was, no doubt, a bumpy, heated ride for the space pioneer, but after a tension-filled period of radio silence, Glenn’s voice reemerged on the radio, bringing great sighs of relief to the folks at Canaveral.

When he was asked about the heat levels within the capsule, Glenn replied, “The propitiation shield is doing its work. I’m fine.”

This is an insightful example of propitiation. As we place our faith in Christ’s Blood, we are shielded from the fires of judgment. That’s where God’s mercy comes in. Through the power of the Passover Lamb, God’s mercy is both realized and appropriated. Thus, for Christians, an encounter with the Living God has more to do with His grace, love, and mercy than His Law, hatred of sin, and its judgment. An encounter with God means to enter into the Sabbath Rest.

Many older commentators actually call the Mercy Seat the “Seat of Propitiation,” for that reason. The blood-stained seat reminds us that we are able to rest in the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

The Art of Being

In my imagination I have seen Moses, frazzled and hassled by the tasks of the world, making a beeline past the Altar of Sacrifice and Laver, flipping up the curtain of the Tent of Meeting, buzzing by the Lampstand, Table and Altar of Incense, ducking through the veil and plopping down on the sandy ground, exhausted and strung-out, before the Ark and Mercy Seat – many, many times.

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”

(Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV)). The Mercy Seat is the one place where we can get alone with God, rest, and be fully known.

The beautiful thing about what happens at the Mercy Seat is that everything is finished. Sin has already been forgiven, healing has already happened; wicks have been trimmed, lamps have been filled, bread has been replaced, and prayers have risen. There is no more work to be done, no more ministry to do; no more *anything at all*.

The only thing left is simply "to be."

We would do well to incorporate this model into our personal spirituality. When we arrive at the Holy of Holies, we need to intentionally divest ourselves of our baggage (anything that breeds of fault, expectation, anxiety, or failure) and learn the age-old art: the art of *being*.

Sitting here, in the unconditional grace of the King, there is no more "doing" of anything. There is simply, only "to be." The Mercy Seat is when we have finally arrived. We have entered into His rest and are embraced by God in His compassion and mercy – just as we are (warts and everything).

In this place, which is so saturated with the Spirit, let our words become few. Let our hearts overflow with grateful and awe-filled adoration. Let us receive the Love of our Father.

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him."

Luke 15:20 (NLT)

BLEEDING PRODIGAL

I've heard You're waiting on the hilltop in the Tree,
where we used to climb and swing.

You'd push me up so high,
my toes would touch the sky;
I've heard You're waiting there for me.

But I have wandered; I have wandered far away.

I even doubt I can return.
My robes are ripped and torn;
my hope has turned to mourn,
so very far from my home.

*And there've been times
when I've blasphemed Your holy Name;
mocked the one who gives me life.*

*But if it's not too late,
I pray don't hesitate,
receive this bleeding prodigal.*

And I look up to see You leaping from the Tree,
with outstretched arms for me.
I'm clutched into Your chest,
I'm cherished at Your breast;
sweet tears of mercy cover me.

*And there've been times
when I've blasphemed Your holy Name;
mocked the one who gives me life.
But if it's not too late,
I pray don't hesitate,
receive this bleeding prodigal.*

*"My child it's not too late,
I will not hesitate;
you are My bleeding prodigal."*

I've heard You're waiting on the hilltop in the Tree,
with outstretched arms,
for me.

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other,

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies!
The whole earth is filled with his glory!"*

Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

Isaiah 6:1-9 (NLT)



"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)

C. Summary of the Holy of Holies

The Holy of Holies was a place unequalled in royalty, mercy, and light. It was the physical dwelling, the tabernacling, of Yahweh - the place where Heaven and Earth swirled as one within the living Shekinah of God, a darkened place of mystery and revelation, righteousness and mercy, judgment and grace.

This is where He lived.

A Glorious Balance

Within the two places of ministry, The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, the delicate balance of God's nature is revealed. Though they are two distinct pieces of furniture, they work together as One.

The gold-plated wood of the Ark is balanced with the pure gold of the Seat, suggesting that Jesus and the Father are One, seamless and fitted within the other.

The Ark speaks to the Law; while the Seat speaks to God's mercy. God's character includes both righteousness and mercy. Here is a glorious balance between the two covenants: Old Testament and New Testament.

The Ark of the Covenant speaks to God's standards of righteousness, holiness, the Law, judgment, and ensuing punishment - the overall unattainable moral and spiritual expectations that God imposes on creation.

Here, He is Old Testament.

The Mercy Seat speaks to God's mercy, His accessibility, His amazing grace and compassion, His protection and shelter, His friendship and intimacy, and His all consuming availability through the Blood.

Mercy triumphs over judgment!

James 2:13b (NIV)

Here, He is New Testament.

Both New Testament and Old Testament define God Almighty. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, regardless of which covenant we happen to be in (Hebrews 13:8).

“Holy, Holy” or “Daddy, Daddy”?

Knowing that you will “be” in the Holy of Holies can cause a certain tension. It comes with the knowledge that you are standing before the massive, all-consuming, Living Fire of God *and* your Heavenly Father, who you have been told to acknowledge as your “Abba.”

The word “abba” is more than just a Swedish band from the seventies. It is a barely definable term of endearment which rolls the American “daddy,” “father,” “needful sustainer,” “protector” and “unconditional lover” all into one. Jesus prayed to the Father as such and told us to do the same (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

So, the question is, “When we pass through the veil and find ourselves standing before the Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat, do we call Him ‘Holy,’ or ‘Daddy?’ Is He Almighty Lawgiver or Merciful Father?”

How does one posture him or herself within the Holy of Holies? Do we hit dirt, joining the glorious company of Heaven as they perpetually cast their crowns to the glorious One who is seated between the wings of the cherubim and seraphim, and cry, “Holy, holy, holy”? Or do we bypass all the formalities, skip into the Throne Room, hop atop the Mercy Seat,

jump into the arms of our Heavenly Father and cry, "Daddy, daddy, daddy"?

Am I His lowly servant or His beloved child?

Short answer: both. He is both, and you are both. He is God *and* Abba; Almighty Father, Abba God, Father God, and Father Almighty – depending entirely on what the Holy Spirit is doing within your particular season of worship.

In seasons of hurt and wounding, He will be "Abba." In times of strength and blessing, He will be "Almighty."

We can't foreknow what will be revealed in the Most Holy Place. It would be presumptuous to think so. Knowing that we have done all we can at the other ministry stations, the best thing we can do is simply enter in without any expectations whatsoever.

*"Be still before the LORD, all mankind,
because he has roused himself
from his holy dwelling."*

Zechariah 2:13 (NIV)

We need to just go on in there and be ourselves.

A Lasting Observation of the Progression

Everything about the Tabernacle of Moses is about "progression." It is about ascent, growth, and moving from glory to glory.

Yet the progressions are different than one might naturally think. For example, some would naturally assume the closer one gets to the Presence of God in the Holy of Holies the brighter things would become. That is not true. The absence of natural light is most pronounced in the Most Holy Place.

Likewise, as we move closer to God, we pass not only from light into darkness but from selfish ministry to selfless ministry; from "me-based"

activities to “He-based” activities; from acquaintance to intimacy; tangible to intangible, and from the material to mystical.

When I was just starting out, I would look at people who were thirty years old “in the Lord” and long to be like them. I was certain that, by that level of Christian maturity, they would have it all together. Well, today I am thirty years old in the Lord and there are times when things are darker than lighter; times when everything I can see has vanished and I am merely walking in blind faith; times when the presence of the Spirit in my life can only be labeled as “His mysterious ways.”

I guess, in that sense, you could say I am, by the grace of God, closer to His Presence.

That is encouraging for us when we find ourselves in darkened, dry places. God lives in darkness. He meets us in our deserts.

Heavenly Reflections

I am continuously amazed at Moses’ uncanny obedience to build the Tabernacle according to the heavenly pattern. I know he must have had questions regarding the piercing of the bread, the crown-like rims of gold around the perimeter of the Table and Altar, the necessity for pure virgin olive oil to fill the lamps, or the intentional uniting of wood and gold.

Yet, I bless him for his obedience! In the Tabernacle, we have heaven. In the Tabernacle, we see the Messiah. Little did he know his obedience to God’s will would bear fruit for thousands of years to follow.

We have seen potent illustrations of Jesus reflected in the construction of the Temple. Yet (and Moses didn’t realize this, either) the Tabernacle is a scaled-down model of the very Throne Room of God – the “real deal,” up in heaven!

Scripture gives us just enough pictures of heaven to whet our appetite. But we can be sure that the blueprints Moses received were made from a prototype of something very much larger indeed. In heaven is a Golden Lampstand with seven lamps burning, a fiery-crystal sea, an altar, where, from underneath, the cries of the martyrs rise up before the Lord in prayer and intercession. And there is a glorious throne surrounded by creatures, each extending wings to the One on the Throne (Revelation 4).

In the blueprints we have a hint of heaven!

The writer of Hebrews says it like this: "And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. If he were here on Earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law. They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: 'Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain.' But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises." (Hebrews 8:3-6 [NLT]).

A Final Word

By now I hope that you have caught on to the overriding idea of progressing through the Tabernacle of Moses. Beginning with the Altar of Sacrifice, each station builds upon another until the Holy of Holies – not unlike, beginning on Sunday, each day of the week builds to the weekend.

I pray this material encourages you to flesh-out the progression in your walk with Christ. In my own experience, the Spirit has guided me all around the Tabernacle of Moses. Sometimes I am in one place for just a

couple of hours. Other times, like where I am as this book is being written, the Lord has had me stationed at one particular place for months.

Let's take a final look at where you have been:

- ❖ You have entered his courts with praise and thanksgiving at the Gate (Psalm 100).
- ❖ You have received forgiveness of your sin at the Brass Altar of Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:19).
- ❖ You have been cleansed by His Word and Spirit of Truth at the Brass Laver (Hebrews 10:22).
- ❖ You have ministered unto the Father of Lights at the Golden Lampstand (James 1:17).
- ❖ You have ministered unto the Lord in sacred community at the Golden Table of Showbread (John 6:35).
- ❖ You have ministered unto the Spirit through prayer and intercession at the second altar, the Golden Altar of Incense (Revelation 5:8).
- ❖ You have worshiped His all-consuming majesty at the Golden Ark of the Covenant (John 1:14).
- ❖ And you have communed with your Heavenly Father at the Golden Mercy Seat (Luke 15:20).

THROUGH THE AGES

At the mountain of the temple, a sacrifice was made.
Not the blood of bulls or turtledoves,
that's not the price He paid.
For our ransom on the Altar, a human body lay;
still His heart pours forth a river that reaches us today.

*From the mountain, through the ages,
Your love captures me.
I sing praises, through the ages,
back to Calvary.*

And deep inside my spirit,
well, I know, there have been times,
when I've heard the sounds of heaven in my mind.

*From the mountain, through the ages,
Your love captures me.
I sing praises, through the ages,
back to Calvary.*

At the mountain of the temple, a sacrifice was made.
Still His heart pours forth a river
that reaches us today.

"As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NIV)

VI.

Living Paradigms: Progressions and Filters

Now that we have gotten familiar with the essential make-up and symbolism of the Tabernacle of Moses, we can begin to integrate its truths into our relationship with Christ. The Tabernacle can teach us how to pray, illustrate our place in the Body of Christ, and give us a deeper appreciation of Church. The applications are endless.

There are two big ideas associated with the idea of Living Paradigms: "progression" and "filters," or spectacles. Let's take a look at the idea of progression.

Progression is everywhere in the Tabernacle of Moses: progression from the Outer Courts into the Inner Courts, progression from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place, progression from one ministry station to the next, and progression out from the Holy of Holies, back out through the Temple, past the Gate, and back into your neighborhood.

Words such as "Christian journey," "earthly pilgrimage," or "spiritual formation" are equally synonymous with this idea of progression.

While it's tempting to think otherwise, I am not using the word "progression" in terms of upward spiritual mobility, though there is a place for that (Hebrews 5:12-14), but more so in the general sense of *movement*. Therefore, in this model, arriving at the Holy of Holies is not the all in all. It is not the last rung on the theological ladder, so to speak.

Each place of ministry of the Temple has its own levels of maturity built within it. Each station is an end in itself.

The idea of movement is essential to a healthy, growing Christian. It is natural to move from glory to glory with regard to our walks with God. It would be unnatural for a Christian to remain in the same place with the Lord for her entire life. One of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to keep us naturally progressing into spiritual maturity.

The other big idea is this: using the Tabernacle of Moses as a filter through which life is experienced; a pair of spectacles through which everything is colored and hued.

This is one of those mystical, right-brained sort of things that doesn't come naturally for some. All the same, using the Tabernacle as a filter is extremely beneficial in labeling and defining spiritual things as we "do life".

I began doing this back in the 1980's and am amazed by its deepening effect in my life today. I can honestly say that, from my personal prayer days and spiritual growth, to the way I counsel and pray for others; from the ordering of my work week, right down to how I create a song list for a worship event, the Tabernacle grid has, by far, been the most influential tool through which I have learned to define my relationship to the Lord and articulate my faith to others.

For example, just the other night a young Chinese couple told me they had just received Christ. They were so happy and were glowing with the excitement of receiving God's forgiveness and grace. That sort of personal ministry happens in the Outer Courts at the Altar of Sacrifice and Brass Laver. So, as I listened through the filter of the Tabernacle, I saw them dancing about the Outer Courts, filled with the joy of forgiveness and the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, Isaiah writes, "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10 [NKJV]). We've seen that the robes of righteousness speak to the white linens adorning the sixty columns and hanging around the perimeter of the Temple. These new robes are given to us as we receive Christ at the Altar of Sacrifice.

My two friends were very much receiving the ministry found in the Outer Courts!

This morning our Pastor was preaching on the need to discover one's ministry and get into service. What was he doing? He was inviting us out of the Outer Courts, where ministry is received, and into the Inner Courts, where ministry is given.

A. Growing in God

As a pastor, part of my job is to seek to pinpoint where people are in their faith and encourage them to press in, deeper in Christ. The Tabernacle filter assists me in this. I can often get a ballpark location of where people are simply by listening to how they pray. When I hear language that is by and large “me-centered,” I know I am speaking with someone who is living, by and large, in the Outer Courts.

A person’s words reveal where their heart is. While you can’t decisively discern where a person is in their positioning of the Tabernacle, you can get pretty close. Many American Christians tend to spend the majority of their time in the Outer Courts. Much of contemporary Christian music is also Outer Court centered. It speaks to “my forgiveness,” “my Jesus,” or “me not being the man I once was.” This isn’t a bad thing – as the Outer Courts are necessary. It becomes a bad thing only when we choose to stay there.

Conversely, when I hear a person speaking in language (or exhibiting behavior) that is by and large “other-focused” and selfless I know I am speaking with someone who has passed through the veil and is ministering somewhere in the Tent of Meeting.

This is where striking a balance is essential. If I’ve ascertained a person is consumed in adoring their Heavenly Father, and that to the neglect of obvious personal issues needing the healing touch of Jesus, I can gently lead them from the Ark back to the Laver. (Weirdly enough, broken people are good at avoiding their issues and do so under a cloak of worship.) Conversely, if I find myself with a person “years old in the Lord,” yet still consumed with the forgiveness of their sins, I encourage them to get into some sort of ministry, something where they are out

there serving others. I mean, it's not as if they can never return to the Outer Courts! Additionally I would add, God will heal them as they enter into ministry.

We have all been called to progress from infancy to adulthood. Even after we are born again, it is natural to move from milk to meat in Christ (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). As babes in Christ, we are much like infants, completely dependant upon others to meet our nourishment and needs. This is a very "me centered" season of life – and well it should be – as it is foundational for our adulthood. But God wants us to grow in the knowledge and love of His Name. If we follow Christ, we will naturally be moving from one end of the Tabernacle of Moses to the other. It is a progression from serving self to serving others.

Jesus reveals this conversion to serving in His post-resurrection words to Peter after his denial of the Christ. "When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (John 21:18 [NIV])

The Tabernacle filter is a remarkable tool in identifying where people are in the faith, and fostering balance into their walks with Christ.

One's Office of Ministry

Another pastoral insight regarding the overlaying of the Tabernacle of Moses upon the Body of Christ falls in the category of helping articulate ones Spiritual gifts and ones lifetime office of ministry.

The Church is composed of many members, each of whom has been endowed with a particular spiritual giftedness. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that each of us has been given spiritual gifts and called into particular ministries. I am one of those people who believe that the most important gift is that of the Holy Spirit. I further commend that since the

gifts of the Spirit are grounded within the Holy Spirit and the Spirit lives in us, then, one may conclude that we have the potential of having all the gifts of the Spirit: prophecy, administration, tongues, interpretation of tongues, mercy, discernment of spirits, teaching, compassion, miracles, and right on down the line. God has the prerogative to pull out any of the gifts of the Spirit in any given situation He deems fit, even if we have “never done that before.”

Once I was in a church when we were waiting on the Lord in silence. In that holy hush my heart began to beat and I felt that God would have me stand up and share a work of prophecy. I was petrified.

“You know that’s not my gift, Lord.”

All the same, the silence got bigger. As I sat there I had a sense of what God was saying, but it was way too amorphous in my head. I made the snap decision to remain seated.

Just then, the man next to me began to wrestle in his chair. After a moment he stood up and humbly spoke to the congregation. While his words were different, the gist of what he was sharing was precisely what I had received.

I learned a wonderful lesson that day. God gives us the privilege of ministry. If we take it, it’s all the more edifying for us. If not, no big shakes. He simply moves on and looks for someone who, in faith, will be obedient to His gentle nudging. Either way, God’s work advances, with or without us.

The second lesson learned brings us back to the filter. We have the capacity to be used by God at each ministry station. God moves us around His Temple as His needs dictate.

Having said that (and hearing this may bring relief to you), you have been wired in uniquely beautiful ways. There is only one you. And

you have access to people's hearts that no one else has. Your particular personality, sense of humor, conversion, and anointing are one of a kind, totally unique. Thus, while you have access to all the gifts of the Spirit (and should expect to work outside your gift-mix from time to time), you will eventually find yourself settling on the regular usage of only two or three gifts in particular.

As you grow in the Lord, He will refine those particular gifts through their usage. You also have the responsibility to nurture the gifts. If your gift is hospitality, for example, enroll in a cooking class. If your gift is teaching, take an education course. If your gift is healing, attend a conference on healing – that sort of thing. This is called fanning the flame. It's easy to overlook. Paul writes to young Timothy, "This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:6-7 [NLT]).

As you continue your work and obedience to living into your spiritual gifts you will eventually develop into the "office" of that gift. You will be known as – your name will become synonymous with – God's gift in you. My friend Betty Tapscott is known as a "healer," for example. She works in the spiritual office of healing. Billy Graham is an "evangelist." His name might as well be the same as the spiritual gift God has given him. When you get to this level of ministry you have arrived at your office, that particular place wherein God ultimately designed you exclusively to work.

What does this have to do with the Tabernacle of Moses? The Tabernacle is an identification tool with one's particular office of ministry. We each have passion for a particular ministry station, a place where we love to linger. When you have found that, you can invest yourself into the symbols presented in that particular ministry station.

Get Back to Where You Once Belonged

I have been asked, "How do I know the location of my spiritual office? Where is my station of ministry?"

I believe the location of a person's spiritual office lies within the trajectory of their first significant encounter with the living Christ.

You can pretty much pinpoint your future ministry by getting back to when God got real for you. Something within that spot – the Christ-encounter, the experience, power, culture, the ritual – provided you with the spiritual DNA which marked not only the conception but the future trajectory of your entire ministry.

I know a priest who is borderline fanatical with regard to the ancient liturgies of the Church. His face comes alive with a child-likeness when anything about Sacramental theology, the Communion of Saints, the Altar, Candles, incense, and the like is mentioned. One day I asked him about his first encounter with the Lord. "How did it happen? Where did it happen?"

Without hesitation, he told me about the time when he was in Europe as a young adult. He walked into an old stone cathedral, slipped through the door, and found himself in the midst of a service. As he looked at the stained glass windows, saw the smoke of incense rising, and heard the chanting of the Eucharistic prayers, he was overcome with the awesome Presence of God. He didn't understand a word of the liturgy, but Jesus entered his heart as he received Communion. Today, he has found his sole purpose in life. He ministers from that same place.

Billy Graham encountered Christ at an evangelistic tent revival. It was outside, with the excitement of hundreds of people "coming forward" to receive Christ. Today, some fifty years later, nothing has changed. He is still there, ministering from the place from where he was called.

Remember my first experience with Jesus? A praise band was on the stage, people were singing in the Spirit, and the power of the Holy Spirit was converting hearts. For me, nothing has changed. I'm still there, ministering in that same place. It's only natural to me.

My priest friend's office deals with the Sacramental nourishment of His people. It is located at the Table of Showbread. Billy Graham's life call is about calling people to repent of their sins by receiving Christ. His spiritual office of ministry is at the Altar of Sacrifice. Likewise, while I have an amazing appreciation for Sacraments and leading others to Christ, my particular office is centered around the teaching of the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I love to see the Spirit healing, restoring, delivering, and setting people free. I am a real Laver Man.

I could go on and on, but you've gotten the picture. We all have life callings which correspond to a place of ministry as outlined in the Tabernacle of Moses.

At this time I invite you to take a moment to reflect on your own spiritual journey. If you are active in your church, see if those activities can be traced back to the "place" of your first encounter with Christ.

If your ministry is connected with your first encounter, think of ways you can "fan into flame" your activities. If you find yourself longing for another place that is more in line with where you began, ask God if He would move you into a ministry station where the realized passion of your first love can be used for His ministry. Be brave to discover the "good deposit" lying within and then faithfully invest in the good work He has called you, from the very beginning, to do.

B. The Living Church

As members of the Body of Christ, we are one living temple – a dwelling place of Christ. When we gather, we are called the Body of Christ. There is a real corporate “templeness” about us which becomes evident in our church seasons and liturgy.

Each one of us is a tabernacle of the Lord unto ourselves. We carry about the aroma of Christ from the Altar of Incense, the holy fear of an awesome Creator from the Holy of Holies, and the grateful awareness of our freedom from sin, found at the Altar of Sacrifice. Throughout our lives the Lord has us visit and revisit various ministry stations in order to engineer His total work of redemption and holiness deeper into our hearts.

Currently I am in a place where God has cautioned me to watch my tongue. (I guess I didn’t get it the first time!) In all I say I am watchful that my words are encouraging and edifying. To my way of thinking, my wick is being trimmed at the Golden Lampstand. By God’s grace, my words will eventually reflect the purity of God.

You may have been in a season where you found yourself on intercession teams. For years, all you did was eat, drink, and sleep prayer. Yet, today, God has brought you into a place of deep refreshment in the Holy Spirit. This movement of God’s people in, around, and through the stations of the Living Church is natural and to be expected.

This also occurs in a corporate sense – the Body of Christ worldwide. Through the ages the Holy Spirit has highlighted particular truths of the Kingdom of God to the world as it has needed to hear it.

For example, when the soldiers returned from WWII they were emotionally distant from their children. The children (known as baby

boomers) grew up without a knowledge of intimacy with their fathers. As the boomers grew into their adolescence and adulthood, there was an essential piece missing in their hearts: that God is our Father.

Thus, it was no accident that the Spirit of God showered the world-wide Body of Christ with assurance of the Fatherhood of God and the experience of being adopted into the family of God. I remember those days. Everything was about the Father's unconditional heart for His children and the "Spirit of Adoption": songs, conferences, books, Bible studies, art, etc. Looking back on those days I think you could say that the Holy Spirit led the Body of Christ into the Presence of the Father, located at the Mercy Seat, in order to minister to her needs and assure her of everlasting Fatherhood.

To Everything, Turn, Turn, Turn

In Ecclesiastes 3, we are reminded that seasons turn and weave their way through our lives. We are also reminded that there are purposes for the seasons of our life.

The idea of seasons is very important in the denominational element of the Church. Within the Orthodox, Catholic, and most Protestant churches, the annual calendar year is divided up into six sections, or church seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Each liturgical season comes complete with its own colors, prayers, readings, music, and ecclesiastical protocol which symbolize the meaning behind the season.

Advent has a preparation theme and forces us to prepare for the Second Coming of the Lord. Its colors are blue or purple and it is four weeks long. Here we have an illustration of the Priests who prepared to minister to God in the Holy Tent.

Christmas' theme is the arrival of Christ to redeem the world and speaks to His birth in our hearts. Contrary to culture, this season is twelve days long. Its color is white. This may speak to the revelation of God's Shekinah Presence and cloud, nestled between the wings of the cherubim at the Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat.

Epiphany follows. Epiphany is all about "light" and is the time we consider the Light of Christ revealed to the non-Jewish people. We're called to shine His light and this season challenges us to do that. Its color is green to symbolize growth. The fire reminds us of the fires which burned in the Tabernacle of Moses, most vividly in the glory of the Golden Lampstand.

Lent is a forty day stretch of time which takes us through the Passion and Death of Christ. We are reminded of the tremendous cost of Calvary and to pick up our crosses to follow Him. The color is purple, for penitence. The Altar of Sacrifice is the place where we consider the horrific death of the Passover Lamb of God.

Easter follows with a fifty day celebration where we feast on the benefits of Christ's resurrection from the dead and enjoy fellowship with the risen King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Its color is white. This season can be affiliated with the feasting and fellowship around the Table of Showbread.

Fifty days later, Pentecost celebrates the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and the beginning of world-wide mission in the Name of Christ. The color for Pentecost Sunday is red, signifying fire and power, with the rest of the season turning to green, symbolizing our growth in the Spirit. The filling and experience of the Holy Spirit is evident in the waters filling the Brass Laver. It is also hinted within the pure-virgin olive oil in the clay lamps resting atop the vines of the Golden Lampstand. The call to go into the world and witness to others is to fill it with the sweet fragrance

of Christ, which is a wonderful by-product of the prayers offered at the Altar of Incense.

So the church calendar keeps us ever moving, ever traveling around the next bend of the desert-journey, not unlike the pillar of fire. It moves us around the year with a steadiness and concentration that forces us to keep moving on in our faith and deeper in our spirituality.

What About Me?

The Liturgical Year provokes reflection, reflection on ones own spiritual pilgrimage. Let's return to the elements of the Liturgical Year and look at them now from the perspective of our personal spiritual journey.

Our journey begins with Advent, and the preparation of the heart to have Christ birthed within. We hear about Him, yet know Him not. At Christmas, we experience His birth and worship the Lord at the Nativity. Epiphany marks the point where the rays of the Christ child penetrate our hearts; God is revealed and grows in our hearts' home; the stable of our heart.

Lent gets us in touch with the sacrificial side of things. We align our spiritual deserts and wilderness times with Christ's determination and, for the joy set before us, the Cross, set our eyes upon Jerusalem. We are raised as new creations in Christ at Easter and are filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, where we are empowered to live victorious lives in Christ.

All these things happen – sometime, somewhere – in the saint's life.

When speaking about the personal implications of the Liturgical Year, my friend and discipler, the Rev. Mike Flynn says, "Don't get hung up on the right sequence. I was in Advent for thirty-one years and then

had Christmas and Pentecost at the same time. A month later I had Good Friday, big time!”

Thus, the Liturgical Year safeguards us from becoming stagnant and produces a stable and well-balanced community of faith – something for which our culture desperately longs. It reminds us that we are a pilgrim people, a Bedouin tribe, moving its way across the desert until safely arriving at the Promised Land.

For the Beauty of Liturgy

As an Episcopal priest, I can say that we pride ourselves as being a liturgical church. That means that our order of worship is fairly predictable, covers the ministry of the Word (Scripture, teaching, and prayers) and the Eucharist (the ancient rite of Holy Communion). These liturgies were the structure of worship in the early church and have their roots in synagogue worship.

The word “liturgy” means “the work of the people.” As in the days when the priests had to sacrifice, trim, and fill, it takes a liturgical person real work to come before the Lord in service and worship.

On a normal Sunday people arrive into the Outer Courts in a vast array of dispositions. Right off the bat we sing songs about the Lord’s sacrifice and grace. It builds faith, provides perspective, and reminds everyone why they are there. We then hear the reading of Scripture. That follows with a sermon on how to get the waters of the Word into our daily life. We affirm our belief in the Creed, confess our sins, receive absolution for our sins, and offer prayers to God. After the Peace, we light candles on the Altar. We share bread and fellowship around Communion.

There are times, just after Communion when the atmosphere is sacred. I can look out on the congregation and can tell some of us are worshipping God in the Holy of Holies.

The components of our service are easily linked to the various ministry stations of the Tabernacle of Moses. We have the Outer Court ministries entering into His Gates with songs of praise and thanksgiving, and hearing the Word read and preached. In the liturgy of the Word, we are reminded of our redemption in Christ, we receive cleansing through the Word, and we are built up as the Body of Christ.

There are a number of churches that begin their service with the Confession of Sin and Absolution. This is closer to the model of the Tabernacle than the order of worship of the Episcopal church.

After the Peace, church changes. We pass through the veil, light candles, and head directly to the Table of Showbread (Holy Communion). As I mentioned, occasionally the presence of God is so thick at the end of Communion that the world completely slips away and we're caught up in adoration to the Father, which means we've arrived at the Holy of Holies. When that happens, it's wonderful!

The next time you go to church, I invite you to superimpose this template over your worship experience. Even if you worship in a free, non-liturgical format, you'll be able to overlay the blueprints of the Tabernacle of Moses with where you are in the service.

C. Teach Us to Pray

We were made to pray, to have fellowship with God through conversation and pouring forth the cries of our hearts.

There are numerous models of prayer. The ACTS model (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication) is a wonderful way to pray on track, with a purpose.

Jesus Himself was a man of prayer. He woke early and got away from the campsite to have conversations with His Heavenly Father. When He'd return, He'd have new vision, renewed power, and a deeper sense of who He was and what He had been called to do. Once His disciples came to Him and asked Him how He prayed. The answer to that question is what we know today as "The Lord's Prayer."

Prayer Daze

I don't particularly like to pray. But I love having a relationship with Jesus. Up until a few years ago I hadn't equated the two. I focused so intently on the right words and protocol that the living relationship part of it simply vanished.

I couldn't believe that people actually liked to pray. I thought it was a real waste of time.

Since then I've learned to think of prayer as the continuation of a lifelong conversation – and I love it! Just like in any other relationship it takes its own ebb and flow. If I make a mistake or even express a human emotion (heaven forbid!), I can be sure He has heard me and can relate to my every feeling.

Prayer is not the end of communication with the Lord, but the means. In the past I had envied people who could pray all the right ways and say all the right things to the point that I was left discouraged and didn't even want to try. Now I have come to realize that, in their prayers, they are not concentrating so much on the prayers in and of themselves, but on the Person to whom the conversation is directed.

That being said, many of us, especially those of us young in the faith, need some sort of guide when we pray. Like a toddler learning to walk, we need a guiding hand to lead us around this big world called "the Kingdom of God." Aside from the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15), I know of no better blueprint for praying to God than the Tabernacle of Moses.

Models

I am going to assume you are fairly well-versed in the progression and the meanings behind the seven ministry stations of the Tabernacle. So let's have some fun and experiment with a couple of models that you can use in your conversations with Jesus.

Each of these prayer models either follow the full progression, a partial progression, or simply remain at one place in the Temple. In this short prayer, see if you can identify each place of ministry. I've laid it out so each line is another place. Ready? Let's try it:

*I praise you, Lord!
Forgive my sins,
and cleanse me today,
filling me with Your Living Word.
as I gaze upon Your glory,
provide me with the nourishment
to be a living prayer for You.
For I worship you, God Almighty
and bless You for Your mercy.
In Christ's Name*

*and in the power of His Blood,
Amen.*

How did you do? Did you notice how the prayer model led us piece by piece into the Holy of Holies: from the Altar of Sacrifice right on to the Mercy Seat? If so, we're ready to move on. If not, go back and read through each line. The progression found in this prayer is identical with the stations as studied earlier in the book.

Who is Doing the Praying Anyway?

If we are praying the way we were made to pray, we won't be praying at all. It will be the Spirit of God praying through us.

Paul says it best, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27 [NIV]).

That means once we set our feet in the Outer Courts and seek to approach the Lord in prayer, the Holy Spirit will lead us into the areas that HE thinks need prayer. We may have our list, our model, our liturgy, but it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to override our agenda and replace it with God's agenda. Thus, there will be times when our prayers may be concentrated on one particular area, or cluster of areas, in the Temple.

I take a monthly prayer day and, with this in mind, I have learned to free myself of any agenda I might bring with me. Of course, I have a general idea of what I need to talk to God about. But the timing, order, wording, and emotions of those prayers I resign to the Spirit before I even hit the road. Knowing the symbolism around each ministry station of the Tabernacle of Moses has been extremely helpful in my spiritual conversations.

Tabernacle Leverage: Models which Bless the Ministry of the Spirit

Most of us, however, simply struggle to pray aloud. We struggle with what to say. We don't want to be irreverent. We want to honor God. Yet, once we get past the first, "Thank You, Jesus for this day," we are at a loss for words.

I would suggest the Tabernacle is a wonderful lens wherein you can pray effective prayers in about any situation.

Scenario #1: You have been asked to lead the opening prayer at a weekly Bible study. At first you cringe – what do I say?! Then you think: Bible study, the Word, the Living Water. You draw on your studies of the Tabernacle of Moses. You think, "Laver" and recall the placement of the Laver in the Outer Courts Temple, its prisms of looking-glasses reflecting through its refreshing water. The Spirit reminds you of its symbolism: that of washing, revealing, and cleansing. You breathe deep. You have enough to go on. What you pray to open the Bible study goes something like this:

*Lord, we thank you that you have gathered us in this place tonight. We thank you for Your amazing gift of eternal life which unites us. I pray, Lord, that as we open our Bibles and peer into Your Word, that Your Spirit would speak through our leader. Help us to see ourselves in the Word and equip us with everything we need to do to minister to You. In Christ I pray.
Amen.*

This prayer was intentional. It centered us in the Outer Courts. Once we got to the Laver, the Spirit gave the words to reflect both the symbolism of the station and the Father's will.

Scenario #2: You have arrived at the end of a wonderful worship event. You kneel before the Lord and lift up your prayers of gratitude and blessing. Your prayer may sound something like this:

"Father, I bless You! You have clothed me in robes of righteousness and made me worthy to come into Your Presence. I honor You. As I gaze upon Your glory, I declare that You are a Holy God! I exalt You and say, 'You are my God and worthy, O God, King of the Universe, to be praised forever.' I lift You high upon the throne where I will give You glory, not only now, but throughout my entire life."

This is a marvelous example of a prayer from the Holy of Holies. Notice there are no needs expressed here, only honor to the King.

Scenario #3: Each Sunday morning at our church the ministry team (priests, worship team, acolytes, healing team, readers, etc.) stand in a circle, hold hands, and pray for the service that follows. When I am asked to pray, I will pray something like this (in this prayer I have made the guess-work easy by putting the ministry station in parenthesis):

Lord, thank you for bringing us here today to be forgiven (Altar of Sacrifice) and filled with the power of Your Word (Brass Laver). I pray that as we minister to You this morning (in the Tent of Meeting) that we would become invisible and You would be made visible (a reference to the darkness in the Tent, alighted only by the Golden Lampstand). May Your fragrance fill this place (Altar of Incense) and may people who don't know You place their trust in Your Mercy (Mercy Seat) and in the work of Your Son (Altar of Sacrifice). Amen.

Other days I have sensed that we had prepared ourselves and were ready simply to worship God. On an occasion such as this my prayer would be simply:

*Lord, how awesome You are.
You are Holy.
Amen.*

VII.

Using the Tabernacle as a Weekly Devotion

There are seven pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle of Moses and seven days in a week. By overlaying one piece of furniture upon each day of the week, it makes for a wonderful devotion, which is certain to enhance your relationship with Christ. The devotion can stand alone as a Bible study, or as a weekly path. Each day, the idea is to meditate on the significance of Christ found in that day's particular ministry post. Make everything you do, every conversation you have, every phone call, e-mail, or "down time" you engage in, be wholly centered on the Messianic significance of the day. Over the years, you will develop a most significant appreciation for the ways of the Lord!

You start the week in the Outer Courts. Mondays and Tuesdays are "me" days. On Monday, stay at the Altar of Sacrifice. Get in touch with your sin and the tremendous price God paid for you to be free and forgiven. Appropriate the Blood of Christ to every surface and depth of your heart: past, present, and future. Call Tuesday "Laver Day." Attend a Bible study where the Living Word can work in you the mind of Christ. Receive prayer for those spiritual smudge marks. Ask the Holy Spirit to wash and cleanse, to fill and restore, and empower you to do anything He wants, to prepare you for ministry during the rest of the week.

Wednesdays through Fridays are "Tent of Meeting Days", or "we" days. You have three days here and three ministry stations to visit. I like

to mix this up. Usually, the order in which I visit the ministry stations, the Lampstand, Table and second Altar, is determined by my schedule, and week to week it's never the same. For example, if I have a lunch appointment on Thursday, I will choose that day as my "Table of Showbread Day." During that time, I will "be there", with all the symbolism and nuance thereof, as I enjoy food and significant conversation over bread. Through the years, however, I have fallen into a routine: Wednesday is the Lampstand, Thursday is the Showbread, and Friday is the day I tend to spend in prayer, perhaps even fasting, at the second Altar. I have presented the devotion in that sequence here, but it doesn't have to be that way for you. Mix it up! Go backwards if needed! Don't get legalistic about where you should be; let the Spirit lead you.

By the weekend, you will have worked through the stations and now you can kick back and simply "be" in the Holy of Holies. You've passed through the veil into the Sabbath rest. The Sabbath day is a day of rest where you enjoy the Presence of God and find comfort in His all-loving companionship; no more work, no "should have beens." It's all been done. It will just be a great day to "be" with your Heavenly Father. Sunday, of course, is more of the same, as it is impossible to separate the Ark from the Seat. For me, Saturday is more of a "Daddy Day." As I putter around and do my "honey do's", I am aware that my Father is hanging with me as well. Sunday then becomes a "Holy Day" where I find God "tabernacling" within the white linen robes of the saints, where He is worshipped in the splendor of His majesty.

Monday comes and you can start the whole thing over again. I invite you to try it for a week. I know that as you live into these devotions, you will be blessed! Take them one day at a time and allow the Lord to speak to you through the devotional template of the Tabernacle of Moses. Are you ready to walk through the week? Let's go!

Opening Prayer

Using the Tabernacle as a prayer guide, start each day of the devotion with a prayer:

*I enter into Your Gates this day
in praise that You will meet me in my desert.
Forgive,
cleanse,
fill,
illumine,
nourish,
and hear my prayer;
I adore You, my Merciful God,
and worship You for ever and ever. Amen.*

A. Monday: Outer Courts, The Altar of Sacrifice

Themes

Today's themes speak firstly to the entrance rites of praise and thanksgiving, then to the themes of Christ's sacrifice and personal forgiveness.

Readings

Psalm 100:4; Psalm 84; John 10:9; 1 Peter 2:1-5; Isaiah 53:4-6;
Psalm 51:1-5, 14-17; Hebrews 9:19-28; Philippians 2:6-8;
Mark 15:33-39; Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 6:23;
Colossians 1:13; Colossians 2:13-15

Direction

Awake with the excitement of meeting God. You know the end of the story – unconditional love and fellowship waiting for you in the Holy of Holies. Sure, there are some steps to take, some ministry to do before you arrive. All in due time. For now, be content to enter through the Gate with a season of simple, heartfelt, thanksgiving – thanksgiving for His attributes and for the marvelous things He has done.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him
and praise his name.*

Psalm 100:4 (NIV)

Then, as you move deeper into the Outer Courts, approach the Altar of Sacrifice with reverence and intent. Imagine yourself offering an animal to

the High Priest for your sins and the sins of your family. Hear its bleating cries as it's thrown on the fiery grid. Jump ahead thousands of years and see yourself at the foot of the cross, the blazing heat of the noonday crucifixion. Hear the hammering of nails and cries of the Son of God in your stead. Receive your forgiveness.

Ask God to reveal any current issues of sin and ask Him to forgive them with the all-sufficient Blood of Christ. Rediscover your need for a savior, reclaim the promise of propitiation, and praise God for the sweet forgiveness that covers all your sin.

*And forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those
who sin against us.
Matthew 6:12 (NLT)*

If you are like me, you will have a couple of areas that you know will need to be brought to the Cross. Yet, I invite you to still your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the items about which He would wish to speak. You may be surprised. We tend to confess behavior to God, but He looks deeper than that. By giving Him free reign over our heart's terrain, He will bypass the behavior and reveal the underlying issues of our hearts.

As you kneel beneath the Cross and gaze upon the Passover Lamb of God consider, "What sins are currently between the Lord and me? What areas in my life (from my thoughts to my relationships) might I need to invoke the Blood of Christ?" Confess your sins and be assured of God's forgiveness.

Throughout the day, intentionally recall the tremendous cost of your sure redemption. As it has been said, "It may be free to us, but it cost Him everything." Be humbly mindful of that. In all you do today, choose to carry the attitude of gratitude. Revel in His amazing grace. You may want to fast, showing God that you are sincerely grieved and that you have a humble and contrite spirit.

The Spirit may surface opportunities today for you to forgive, or be forgiven by, others. Walk intentionally into these opportunities, knowing they have been orchestrated by the High Priest, Jesus Christ, here, at the Altar of Sacrifice.

Prayer

And by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5b (NKJV)

*As you awake,
I pray the Holy Spirit would bring you
into his Gate with thanksgiving
and into His courts with praise!
Rise and rejoice –
for He has been waiting for you!*

*As you approach the place of the Cross –
a place where you will be both confronted
and comforted by the Lamb who was slain
from the foundation of the world –
I pray you would understand both God's
judgment upon the horrific nature of your sin
and – in that same instant –
the unending reservoir of grace and
forgiveness, flowing forth from the generous
heart of Calvary, into the hearts of all who
call upon the Name of the Lord.*

*I ask God also to free you from all manner of
bondage, behavior, and resentments –
through which,
if either entertained or encouraged,
would further enslave you
from perfect freedom.*

*By the power of the Cross,
and the Blood which was shed at Calvary,
be severed from all cords of sin and death,
in Jesus' Name.*

*Finally, I pray that,
as you receive God's forgiveness
and deliverance into the barren places
of your heart,
you would also arise with the grace to
extend forgiveness
to those who have caused you pain,
to those who have pierced your side with
their actions
and have hammered your wrists and feet
with all manner of false accusations and
judgment.*

*In the Name and power
of the Blood of the Lamb.
Amen.*

B. Tuesday: Outer Courts, The Brass Laver

Themes

Today's themes center on sanctification and empowerment. Cleansing, anointing, purification, the mind of Christ, and spiritual refreshment are given through the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

Readings

Acts 2:37-38; Psalm 24:3-6; Isaiah 1:16-18; Psalm 51:6-13;
Revelation 22:1-5; Psalm 51:2; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Titus 3:4-7;
1 Peter 3:18-22; John 4:10-14; Ephesians 5:25b-27; 1 John 5:6-8;
John 7:37-39; Ephesians 5:18; James 1:21-25; Malachi 3:1-4;
John 15:3; Romans 5:5

Direction

Today can take many directions. You've been forgiven (yesterday) and today is about the wonderful things that happen as you get before the Word of God. Make the Word be the focus of this day. Read Scripture in a richer manner, allowing the Lord to take every word to the depths of your soul. As you pray through the day, pay particular attention to the Word in songs, verses on your day-timer or calendar; make a point to listen to a podcast of an esteemed Bible teacher or preacher – all with the understanding that the Holy Spirit will cleanse, wash, and anoint you as your medium of choice reflects your soul through the Living Water.

Take some time in the afternoon to get alone with God. Ask Him to pour out the love of the Father through the Holy Spirit throughout your heart (Romans 5:5). As He does this, it won't be long before you will see the reflection of your heart's impurity in the reflection of His Word. Go with it. It may be ugly at first, but as these hurtful memories, experiences, or other events surface, He will at once heal you with the Living Water! (Those things aren't worth holding onto anyway, as they have the potential to breed judgment, bitterness, and even physical infirmities in the future.)

*Purify me from my sins,
and I will be clean;
wash me,
and I will be
whiter than snow.
Psalm 51:7 (NLT)*

What happens in the Outer Courts on Monday and Tuesday will give you everything you need to move deeper into the "tents of the righteous" for the rest of the week.

Seek to avoid the temptation to wallow in past failures or sin. You received God's wonderful forgiveness yesterday for that. Today, however, you are a new creation in Christ. Old things have passed and everything has become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Rush to the streams of life and be cleansed from the residue of the old life. Those same shortcomings may surface here at the Laver, yet with an entirely different purpose. Yesterday they were forgiven; today they will be healed.

Bring to Him your very being (i.e., thoughts, motives, patterns of behavior, addictions, etc.) which, up to now has remained a stench in your tomb, before the stone was gloriously rolled away.

Closing Prayer

*Now hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts
by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

*I pray this day,
that your heart would be filled
with rejoicing and delight
because of the wonderful work
the Father has bestowed upon you
through the Holy Spirit!*

*I pray today
He would nurture and mature you in Christ,
through His Living Word;
and that,
as you set yourself down to read, study,
and inwardly digest the pages of Scripture,
you would be refreshed, cleansed,
and sanctified in your heart, mind, and soul
by Jesus, who is the Living Water.*

*I also pray that God would wash you anew
through the power of the Holy Spirit;
that you would be filled
with all might and spiritual authority
to do the work He has given you to do.*

*I pray that
He would fall upon you – even now –
and bless you with the gifts
you have so longed for and desired.*

*Finally, I pray He would empower you
to walk in the fullness of the Spirit,
and you, at the end of this day, would be*

Weekly Devotion: The Brass Laver

*enthused, encouraged, and empowered
for the work of your ministry.*

*In the power of His Name.
Amen.*

C. Wednesday: Inner Courts, The Golden Lampstand

Themes

The themes for the rest of the week switch from receiving ministry to ministry flowing forth from you. You will experience fulfillment, of course, in the doing of ministry, but the central motivation of it all will be for Someone else.

Today's themes are centered around the things that need to happen so ministry can happen. This is "behind the scenes" ministry at its best.

Readings

Isaiah 4:2-6; Revelation 1:12-20; John 15:1-5, 8, 12, 16; John 8:12;
1 Peter 2:9; Matthew 5:14-16; Psalm 18:28; Acts 2:1-4;
Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; John 17:20-26

Direction

Welcome to the Inner Courts! Today you'll be standing before a beautifully sculpted piece of gold that shines forth with the very radiance of Heaven. In all you do, revel in His majesty and radiate the Light of Christ.

Be looking for the Light of Christ in people everywhere you go. Observe carefully; it may not be so evident at first! And be aware that, in turn, you too may become a light to those you meet today. Live into that

role. In every “darkened tent” seek and reveal Truth, allowing nothing deceitful or shadowy to happen in or around your presence.

This morning, as you awake, enter through the Gate with thanksgiving. As you pass the Altar of Sacrifice and Brass Laver, thank the Lord for what He did there on Monday and Tuesday. Slip through the veil into mystery and stand before His ever-searching, ever-revealing, ever-illuminating rays. Allow His Spirit to penetrate your darkness. Let the lamp of His eye search you and know you, completely and deeply. Gaze in holy wonder at His splendor and holiness. Become transformed from glory to glory as you dare to stare into His eyes of fire.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12 (NIV)

As you go about the day, seek to participate in activities that will further Christ’s ministry. For example, if you are engaged in administrative tasks for a Bible study, the scheduling of a worship band, programming a youth retreat, or the crunching of numbers for the church, be diligent about the work to the “nth” degree, knowing your work will bring about events wherein others will bring glory to His Name. Shine light into every corner; leave no stone unturned. God has anointed you to create light under which His ministry can happen.

God may give you uncanny insight as to whom you could ask to participate in a current project you’re working on. He will show you their potential and equip you with whatever it takes to make them a team player. Likewise, there may be a person on the team who is not on the same page as the rest of the crew. Today may be your day to speak the truth in love, and redefine the parameters of the original call.

As you get into the afternoon or evening, a curious thing may happen: you may find the master Vinedresser trimming your wick. In that vein, regard any hardships or frustrations of the day simply as the

“discipline of the Lord,” knowing that His pulling and clipping is all about your loving Father affirming your gifts. He loves to see His passion burn through you and does all He can to make you shine as you were created to do.

Closing Prayer

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."*

Isaiah 6:3b (NIV)

*Father, you have called us
to burn as one body with You
that the world would be filled
with the light of Your glorious majesty.*

*As we arise this day,
we pray You would enable us to shine like stars
in the midst of this crooked and corrupt generation.
Trim us to Your purity,
polish us to Your righteousness,
and fill us with a unified witness of the Living Vine,
for all the world to see.*

*We also ask that You would fill our hearts
to burn with Your holy prerogative;
Your missionary desire
to advance Your ministry into the darkest corners of the earth.
Give us prophetic clarity in how we can best
serve the efforts of others in their ministry;
how we can best assist those You have called
into public service.*

*You are the Light of the World.
Amen.*

D. Thursday: Inner Courts, The Golden Table of Showbread

Themes

Today's themes are all about ministering to God through the provision of nourishment to others: Holy Communion and the joy of fellowship with the Beloved.

Readings

Psalm 23:5-6; John 6:30-35; Matthew 26:26-30;
1 Corinthians 11:23-33; John 4:31-38; Hebrews 10:23-25; Psalm 133;
Zechariah 13:6; Zechariah 12:10-11; John 19:32-37

Direction

Are you ready for some "soul food"? If so, today is your day!

Today is the day in the week where you will want to keep your antennae up when attending anything "social" – especially with other Christians. In conversation, give yourself permission to share on a deeper level. Reveal a bit more than is seen on the surface, assured that God will take your words and use them to nurture others. Likewise, seek your own nourishment through what you hear from others. The Body of Christ is a mystical conglomeration of individual souls. God uses the Body to nourish

the Body; He speaks to us, ministering unto Himself, through the Body. Allow that to happen.

When I have the opportunity to have coffee, lunch, or schedule another “food” meeting on a Thursday, I immediately take it – even if it involves considerable sacrifice. I simply choose to know God will somehow be ministered to during our gathering.

*Then Jesus explained:
"My nourishment comes from doing
the will of God, who sent me, and
from finishing his work.*

John 4:34 (NLT)

During our time God always changes the water of our conversation into wine. Even an IHOP can be transformed into a God-ordained nurturing station for body, mind, and soul! Through our time together, I am most always fed by the bread of fellowship, even in children. I know that all believers in Jesus are mysteriously united in the Bread of Life (who was pierced for our transgressions, baked through crucifixion, and raised as the Light of the World). It is through His gift that edification and fellowship happens.

Through the day, be on the lookout for any themes that may run common through different people. As mentioned, God often speaks *through us, to us*; just another wonderful thing that happens as we minister to the Living Manna.

Finally, why not cap off the day by finding a local church or Bible study to celebrate Holy Communion? At the end of the night, you'll drop into bed having been nourished – and having nourished others – with the Living Manna.

Closing Prayer

*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles
the glorious riches of this mystery,
which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Colossians 1:27 (NIV)

*Lord God,
as we arrive at the Table of Showbread,
we are, this day,
again reminded of the mystery,
"Christ in us."
As we gaze upon the pita,
we remember
the One who was baked and pierced for our transgressions;
and we are reminded
that we are actual members of that same Body.*

*Holy Spirit,
we ask that You would
create "divine appointments" with others,
that our conversations
would reach deep into our hearts
and be nurtured by the Living Manna,
Jesus Christ.
In the mystery of the Word made flesh,
change our water into wine,
and speak to the Body of Christ
through the Body of Christ.*

*In the Name of the Bread of Life.
Amen.*

E. Friday: Inner Courts, The Golden Altar of Incense

Themes

The themes of this most humble, second Altar deal with prayers, intercessions, and meditation within intimate conversation with God.

Readings

Isaiah 56:6-7; Luke 19:46a; Revelation 8:3-5; Romans 8:26-27;
Psalm 141:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 11:2-4; Hebrews 4:14-16;
Ephesians 1:15-19a; Ephesians 3:14-19

Direction

You have arrived at the third and final ministry station of the Tent of Meeting. It's a tremendous privilege and responsibility to spend a full day in prayer.

As you dress for this day, be reminded that, while this is the smallest station in the Tabernacle, it is perhaps the most significant. The Altar of Incense is as close as

*"It is written," he said to them,
"My house will be a house of prayer'."*

Luke 19:46a (NIV)

one can get to the Ark of the Covenant without passing through the veil. It is closest to the heart of the Father.

Thus, you may want to consider fasting for a meal or two today, making the day really count. (Devout Catholics routinely fast from eating meat on Fridays.) Plan to take the time you'd ordinarily spend eating and use it instead to be with God. If you are like me, you will NOT find these times particularly rewarding. It will be afterward, however (during the course of the following days, weeks, and months), that your sacrifice will come alive.

Before leaving the house, get away somewhere and ask the Lord if He would give you a couple of things to "carry about" with you through the day. The High Priests carried around a breastplate of twelve precious stones on their chest, one stone for each tribe of Israel, symbolizing their constant intercession for those tribes before their Lord in everything they did. (See Exodus 28:15-21 and 29-30.) Do something like that. As the precious impressions come, jot them down and carry them with you through the day. Then, through the day, be faithful to lift your "precious stones" to the Lord. Maintain the freedom to pray for as long or short as you have to as you move from one item to the next, with the understanding that the Spirit is praying through you, moving you through the stones, at His speed, intensity, and at His good pleasure. At the end of the day, you might consider calling the people of your prayers and asking them how their day went!

So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.
Exodus 28:30b (NKJV)

To some, the idea of taking a prayer day is idyllic. It's perceived as a "day off" where you simply linger in the sweetness of God and the two of you enjoy fellowship and sit with each other admiring each others' beauty. But that is rarely so. Spiritual fellowship happened yesterday at the Table of Showbread and you can sit and admire each others' beauty tomorrow morning in the Most Holy Place. I have taken many "prayer days" and have found them to be emotionally difficult. While there are times of sweetness and admiration, true intercession happens when God

takes His heart for a person, place, or situation – even the emotions of His heart with regard to those – and superimposes it upon the heart of the intercessor. When that happens, it can be

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Romans 8:26-27 (NIV)

a difficult, even painful experience. You may cry for no “known” reason, become filled with a righteous anger, or be physically pained in your body. Prayer on this level is a gift from God (Romans 8:22-23). I have found my prayer language to be helpful in these times of deep intercession.

Through it all, remain humble. Be attuned, continually yielding to what He has given you and His specific ways of praying. Remember: His ways are not your ways. You may question how He is calling you to pray for a situation, but pray anyway, lifting up your hands sacrificially unto the Lord. When you do this your prayers will be powerful and effective (James 5:16b). They will rise like incense before the throne of grace and He will be pleased!

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Psalm 141:2 (NIV)

Closing Prayer

*"It is written," he said to them,
" 'My house will be a house of prayer'."*

Luke 19:46a (NIV)

*Heavenly Father,
we consecrate ourselves to You this day
as a sacrifice of prayer and intercession*

unto the almighty throne of grace.

We ask You the same question that Your disciples asked You:

"Teach us to pray."

Fill us with Your Spirit that we may know how to pray;

that we would lift up prayers and petitions unto You;

not according to our will, but in accordance to Your holy will.

We ask specifically,

that You would create for us a special, intimate time with You,

sometime during this day

- a time of Your own choosing -

where we would hear You say,

"come away from the hustle and bustle of the day

and spend a few precious moments with Me,

lifting up holy hands in the temple of the Lord."

Speak with us,

share Your desires,

lay Your dreams upon our hearts.

As we receive them,

we will bless them

and offer them back

as a sweet fragrance unto You.

Fashion us, O Lord, this day,

to be a house of prayer.

Amen.

F. Saturday: Holy of Holies, The Ark of the Covenant

Themes

Today's theme speaks to righteousness, justice, majesty, and omnipresence found in God Almighty. He is robed with the universe and enthroned in eternity as the Judge and Creator of all that is seen and unseen – and yet, He has opened the curtain and wishes to enjoy you, and the pleasure of your presence, all day long.

Readings

Isaiah 6:1-8; Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 5:6-14;
Hebrews 10:12-13; Hebrews 12:1-2, 18-24

Direction

It's Saturday; welcome home! Although you've entered the darkest, most celestial part of the Tent, it is also the brightest. You have arrived before the Shekinah-lit Presence of Almighty God.

If it were not for the smear of atonement blood on the Ark of your heart, this would be a place of horror, fear, and judgment for you. But you were marked and sealed with the Blood of Christ (in the Outer Courts) and have access to the Eternal Throne of God. Thus, He sees you like His Son. He is delighted with you and has longed for this time you have chosen to give Him. To Him, it's like "Happy Father's Day" – all day long. Hallelujah!

Today is a marvelous day when you can kick back and enjoy the unique friendship with the Omnipotent God of Time and Space *and* your Heavenly Daddy – both, within the same Person, at the same time.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Romans 8:15-16 (NIV)

This can be an unnerving place to be – caught within the friendship of King and Friend. For example, just when you are sharing with Him your dreams of what you'd like to be in the future, He gently taps you on the shoulder and reminds you that He is the One who placed those dreams in your heart in the first place.

Or, just when you've shared with Him something so special – something that you've never shared with anyone else in the whole wide world – you suddenly realize that He is God. He knows your every thought. He even knows the number of hairs on your head. Yet, although He already knew about that "special something" you shared with Him, He reacts to it with love and surprise, almost as if He had never heard it before!

Or, just when you are worshipping Him in the glory of His majesty – face buried in the carpet and caught up with the angels and archangels chanting, "Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with your glory!", He lifts you off the floor, swings you around on His shoulder, and takes you for a run on the beach! How utterly and completely unnerving!

Regardless of the perceived incongruities, today you have been invited to walk with Him, to talk with Him, to foster eternal relationship with Him. So celebrate this spiritual friendship in all you do. Invite Him to do something special, something that forces you to play or have fun. Attend a show, walk through a museum, invite Him to the zoo. Take a bike ride, fly a kite, or read a book with Him.

Through it all allow Him to “Father” you.

Here’s a good one: take your child out for a milkshake. And, as you watch her slurping out the bottom of the glass with her straw, allow God to “Father” your child through you. (But be careful here, as you may catch a glimpse of your Father “Fathering you back” in the eyes of your child!)

Give yourself permission to be treated as a King’s kid – like that beautiful princess or that handsome prince – for it is who you are. At His invitation, enthrone yourself within the lush robes of His ever-living, ever-loving holiness. Be wide-eyed and amazed as you fall in love again and again with the One who walks with you in the cool of the day.

Closing Prayer

*“O LORD Almighty, God of Israel,
enthroned between the cherubim,
you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.”*

Isaiah 37:16 (NIV)

*You are wholly glorious,
O King of the Ages,
and worthy of all praise and adoration.
Indeed, eternity itself humbles itself
before Your all-consuming throne.
Your temple is filled
with the festive company of mortals,
angels, and archangels,
day and night, crying unto You:
“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory!”
Your majesty reflects from the crowns at Your feet.*

*Flashes of lightening and deafening thunder
are shadowed by the One shrouded in blinding light.*

*Living rainbows surround You
and embrace You
with the favor of Creation.*

*As creation breathes, "Holy is He!"
As creation plays, "Holy is He!"
As creation whispers, "Holy is He!"
As creation is silent, "Holy is He!"
As creation waits, "Holy is He!"
As creation loves, "Holy is He!"
As creation lives this day, "Holy is He!"*

G. Sunday: Holy of Holies, The Mercy Seat

Themes

Today's theme speaks to everlasting peace, the saturation of God's mercy upon the heart, and the opportunity for unguarded "being" in the midst of God's mercy and grace.

Readings

Psalm 46:10; Numbers 7:89; Exodus 33:7-11; Hebrews 4:9-10;
Deuteronomy 4:27-31; Isaiah 66:1-2, 13; Isaiah 54:4-8;
Luke 15:17-24; Ephesians 2:4-6; Titus 3:3-7; Psalm 139:1-18

Direction

Congratulations! You've made it! What a tremendous week it's been. You've been forgiven and cleansed, you've ministered to God and His Saints, and here you are in this second day in the Most Holy Place, awed by His beauty and basking in His mercy.

As you awaken lie silently for a moment and meditate on His words, "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 146:10a [NIV]).

And, as you meditate, know that God is Love. His Presence is as thick as a cloud; He is all over you.

As you rise from your bed and prepare for the day, posture yourself within the beautiful reality of having entered into God's "Sabbath rest."

God's rest is like no other. It defuses all expectations, melts away all the "undone's" and "should-have-done's," and gently caresses the individual for who he or she is, not for who he or she should be. It is similar to where you were yesterday (i.e., no sin to confess, no wicks to trim, no prayers – nothing left to do but simply "be" a human being), but with the added saturation of God's indescribable mercy. Allow this mercy and redemption to be the holy backdrop wherever you find yourself on this very special Day of the Lord.

Again, you'll want to guard yourself against the tendencies to revisit Egypt, the land of your past (along with its accompanying "all over the chart" emotions). Rather, be internally captivated and embraced in God's present mercy, who overshadows each step of your desert pilgrimage with the golden radiance of His wings.

This is a safe place. Sit, drop your guard, and rest in pure comfort. You will be bathed and cherished by the God of all mercy.

It has been suggested that those who linger in this most sacred of spaces have heard the very songs of heaven – the song of the Bridegroom singing over His bride. These are hauntingly sweet melodies of God's favor, cascading forth into the weary and downtrodden heart.

*You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
Psalm 32:7 (NIV)*

As you embark on your day be on the "listen" for prophetic assurances of His love for you. You may hear them in a song, experience them through nature, or simply know them to be true in your heart of hearts.

As you get to church and gather for worship make it more than a social time. This marks the capstone of a week filled with Spirit-led ministry – from one end of the Tabernacle to the other – and it's all

accumulating here in the Sanctuary of God's holy temple. Rejoice in the Lord, seek Him everywhere – from the people to the preaching, from the prayers to Communion. Be listening for a special word He may speak to you. After all, you are His beloved, and He has waited all week to commune with you there, between the wings of the cherubim.

Likewise, you too have waited all week to meet Him here, so worship Him with a pure and holy abandon. Let His Shekinah cloud overshadow you and revel in the sweet fragrance that will come as you rest in the unconditional favor of the Lord.

Closing Prayer

*For judgment is without mercy
to the one who has shown no mercy.
Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

James 2:13 (NKJV)

The Lord would say to you this day:

*"Come to Me, and I will give you rest.
You are my child of mercy.
Sit with Me this day; enter into My rest.*

*Choose to know My love within My all-knowing gaze;
experience My friendship between the shadow of My wings.
Allow Me to nestle you in My robes.
You will be stilled and filled with My unearthly Presence.*

*Don't be afraid. You are safe here.
Draw near to Me and gaze deeply.
I am, here and now, forever yours,
as you are forever Mine.
Nothing more matters than now.*

*You are My beloved.
I have no agenda here –
none other than the desire to lavish you with My love.
Here there are no thoughts of sin, shame, or disappointment;
no regrets, should-have-been's, or could-have-been's.
The only thing here is Me.
And I love you for who you are –
who I have created you to be.
I have never loved you less than this moment
and I will never love you more than this moment.
I am delighted with you, My child –
delighted!*

*Would you receive My love today?
I promise not to hurt you.
Would you listen to My song for you today?
I promise, you will love the melody!
Would you bring this –
this moment of full pleasure and freedom in Christ –
everywhere you go today?
I so long to play with you, swing with you,
skip with you, silently sit with you
– to simply be with you –
anything, anything at all.*

*Rise up, My child.
Let us go – the day is ours!*

VIII.

Closing Prayer

Amen

I pray this study has been revealing to you. There is so much to say about the Tabernacle of Moses, so much unsaid here.

God does nothing by happenstance. Each measurement, each event, is planned and used by Him to bring glory to His Name. Things which seem senseless to us are highly significant to Him; if not now, perhaps thousands of years in the future. The blueprints and pattern of the Tabernacle speak to this. Our Lord Jesus Christ is living in each piece, each measurement, and each symbol of that archaic place. Who would have known?

Our job, of course, is to be obedient to what the Spirit is doing, just as Moses was, so that our fruit would be lasting from one generation to the next.

As I finish "Meet Me in the Desert," I will use the template of the Tabernacle of Moses and give thanks to God for His servant Moses and for you.

God bless you!

*Thank you, Father, for Your servant Moses. You called him out
of the land of bondage and into the Promised Land.*

*You spoke to him,
and equipped him with everything he needed
to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt
and into Israel.*

Closing Prayer

*Then, having arrived back
at the place where You first appeared to him,
You gave him the precise blueprints
for Your dwelling,
Your roving earthly sanctuary.*

*Thank you for his obedience, Lord,
his sacrificial determination
to follow the Cloud wherever it led him.
Thank you, that as we gaze through the ages into this one
man's obedience,
we are able to know more about You,
the God we serve,
Your mercy and Your standards of holiness;
wondrous revelations that can only be seen from this side of the
Cross.*

*And I thank you for this study, too.
I pray that You would use it to be a powerful tool in the life of
Your people.
Use it to forge a glorious reflection
of Your Son in their hearts.
Nourish Your saints in its reading.
As they grow deeper into the mystery of 'Christ in them,'
I pray Your Spirit would continuously reveal the joy that only
comes from serving others in the Tent of Meeting.*

*I also pray that Your Spirit would move them around, one
station to the next, from glory to glory, until they arrive at the
place they need to be.
Teach them to linger where You linger,
and reveal wisdom in each station.
Also call forth the office of ministry embedded in each of them.
Help them to discover and nurture the gifts of the Spirit that
were given to them back at the Laver.*

*May we rise from this place
encouraged in Your love for us
and sustained in the power
of Your Holy Spirit*

*through the Blood of the Lamb.
We know that one day we will be eternally with You in Heaven.
In the meantime, may Your reflection in us be a compelling
witness
to those who have yet to see
Your glorious majesty.
By Your grace,
may we bring many, many people
through Your Gates
where we can dance with them
at the foot of the Cross.*

In the Name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

LET'S DANCE!

In the fellowship of saints,
we have praised His Name;
now it's time to rise,
and bid this place, "Good-bye."
We've listened and we've heard,
to God's anointed Word;
and now it's time to send-us-out,
into the world to sing-and-to-shout!

*Rejoice in His presence;
rejoice in His Name;
rejoice in the beauty
of the world He did create.
Shout it in the marketplace,
sing it in the streets,
"God created everything
to dance within His beat!"*

Let's dance! Dance!
Dance unto the King!
Dance! Let's dance!
For all the world to see!

Closing Prayer

Jesus, we will go,
into the world and show,
the wonder of Your love,
to those who do not know:
the beauty of Your face,
the mysteries of Your grace.
We'll go out and seek-the-lost,
And dance with them at the foot-of-the-cross.

*Rejoice in His presence;
rejoice in His Name;
rejoice in the beauty
of the world He did create.
Shout it in the marketplace,
sing it in the streets,
"God created everything
to dance within His beat!"*

Let's dance! Dance!
Dance unto the King!
Dance! Let's dance!
For all the world to see!

IX. Appendices

A. The Fiery Cloud

The science of how God appeared in the desert and led the Hebrews through their forty-year pilgrimage through the Sinai remains a mystery. Some have speculated that the origin of the lighted pillar was organic, a form of biological phosphorescence, not unlike that of fire flies, deep sea creatures, or even the northern lights.

All we really know is that the God who appeared to Moses in the lighted bush, which burned but was not consumed, dwelt with and led the people, for all to see.

Here are a few things we know about the Fiery Shekinah, the tangible presence of God, which manifests light, power, and presence:

- ❖ God escorted the Israelites into the desert and over to Mt. Sinai in a cloud.

"The LORD went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire.

This allowed them to travel by day or by night.

And the LORD did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people."

Exodus 13:21-22 (NLT)

*"[The Lord God], who goes before you
looking for the best places to camp,
guiding you with a pillar of fire by night
and a pillar of cloud by day."*

Deuteronomy 1:33 (NLT)

- ❖ Moses entered into the cloud and received the Ten Commandments and the blueprints of the Tabernacle.

*"Then the LORD said to Moses,
'Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there and I will give you the
tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and
commands so you can teach the people.'
So Moses and his assistant Joshua set out,
and Moses climbed up the mountain of God. Moses told the elders
'Stay here and wait for us until we come back. Aaron and Hur are
here with you. If anyone has a dispute while I am gone,
consult with them.'
Then Moses climbed up the mountain,
and the cloud covered it.
And the glory of the LORD settled down on Mount Sinai, and the
cloud covered it for six days.
On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from inside the cloud.
To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the LORD
appeared at the summit like a consuming fire.
Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the
mountain. He remained on the mountain
forty days and forty nights."*

Exodus 24:12-18 (NLT)

- ❖ The day the Tabernacle was dedicated, the cloud settled over the Holy of Holies, just above the Ark of the Covenant.

*"So at last Moses finished the work.
Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle,
and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses could no
longer enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down
over it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.*

Exodus 40:33b-35 (NLT)

*"On the day the Tabernacle was set up,
the cloud covered it.
But from evening until morning the cloud over the Tabernacle
looked like a pillar of fire."*

Numbers 9:15 (NLT)

- ❖ God moved the people at His own pace, at His own discretion, into their desert pilgrimage.

*"Whenever the cloud lifted from over the sacred tent, the people of
Israel would break camp and follow it.
And wherever the cloud settled,
the people of Israel would set up camp.
In this way, they traveled and camped at the Lord's command
wherever He told them to go. Then they remained in their camp as
long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle.
If the cloud remained over the Tabernacle for a long time, the
Israelites stayed and performed their duty to the LORD.
Sometimes the cloud would stay over the Tabernacle for only a few
days, so the people would stay for only a few days,
as the LORD commanded.
Then at the LORD's command they would break camp and move on.
Sometimes the cloud stayed only overnight
and lifted the next morning.
But day or night, when the cloud lifted,
the people broke camp and moved on.
Whether the cloud stayed above the Tabernacle for two days,
a month, or a year, the people of Israel stayed in camp
and did not move on.
But as soon as it lifted, they broke camp and moved on. So they*

camped or traveled at the LORD's command, and they did whatever the LORD told them through Moses."

Numbers 9:17-23 (NLT)

"Now whenever the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out on their journey, following it.

But if the cloud did not rise,

they remained where they were until it lifted.

The cloud of the LORD hovered over the Tabernacle during the day, and at night fire glowed inside the cloud so the whole family of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys."

Exodus 40:36-38 (NLT)

❖ In Scripture, God used clouds to be in, to speak through, to be His glory, or to be a theophany. (A "theophany" is a visible appearance of God; in many cases, the Holy Spirit Himself.) I recommend the following scriptures to you for a fascinating study. As you read them, note what is being done "through the cloud."

- ❖ Exodus 13:21-22; Exodus 40:34-38
- ❖ 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14
- ❖ Matthew 18:10-11; Mark 9:7; Acts 1:9
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 with 1 Corinthians 12:13
- ❖ Ezekiel 43:1-5; Revelation 15:5, 8

B. For Further Study and Reading

There is so much more: studies on numerology, the priestly garments, precious gems in addition to other temples! Too much for this humble book. However, here are some suggestions for further study:

- ❖ Bibles and Bible Commentaries provide wonderful insights into the temple. Do a self-study through Exodus with a good study Bible like the following:
 - ❖ Life Application Study Bible
 - ❖ NIV Study Bible, Zondervan
 - ❖ Spirit-Filled Bible, The Spirit-Filled Life Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers
- ❖ Bible Dictionary: A Bible dictionary will give you context and customs, both of which bring passages to life.
- ❖ Internet: The internet, or World Wide Web, is a haven for deeper study, as well as for interesting images from artists of the components of the Tabernacle.
- ❖ Hands-on: Make a model of the Tabernacle of Moses. (I have made two of them.) The process is amazingly insightful and a wonderful creative project for you and/or your children, not unlike creating a manger to place in your front yard during Advent. Models of the Tabernacle of Moses come in assorted sizes and shapes. Find one that you can paint bronze, silver and gold, one that has curtains and columns. Make clay figurines and walk them all around the Outer and Inner Courts! To find a model, look on the internet and/or through Sunday school curriculums.

- ❖ Temple Fever: The Tabernacle of Moses is the first and smallest of Biblical Temples. These buildings, while different in size and scope, carry the same DNA of the Tabernacle of Moses. For you real enthusiasts, launch out on your own self-study on the temples of David, Solomon, and Herod. Don't forget about the best temple of all – the Heavenly Temple which is yet to be seen by us and is described in Isaiah 4 and Revelation.

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*I have not stopped giving thanks for you,
remembering you in my prayers.*

Ephesians 1:16 (NIV)

Acknowledgments

With heartfelt appreciation to all who supported me in this endeavor. May the Lord bless you and shower you with His love and grace. You are truly a blessing to me.

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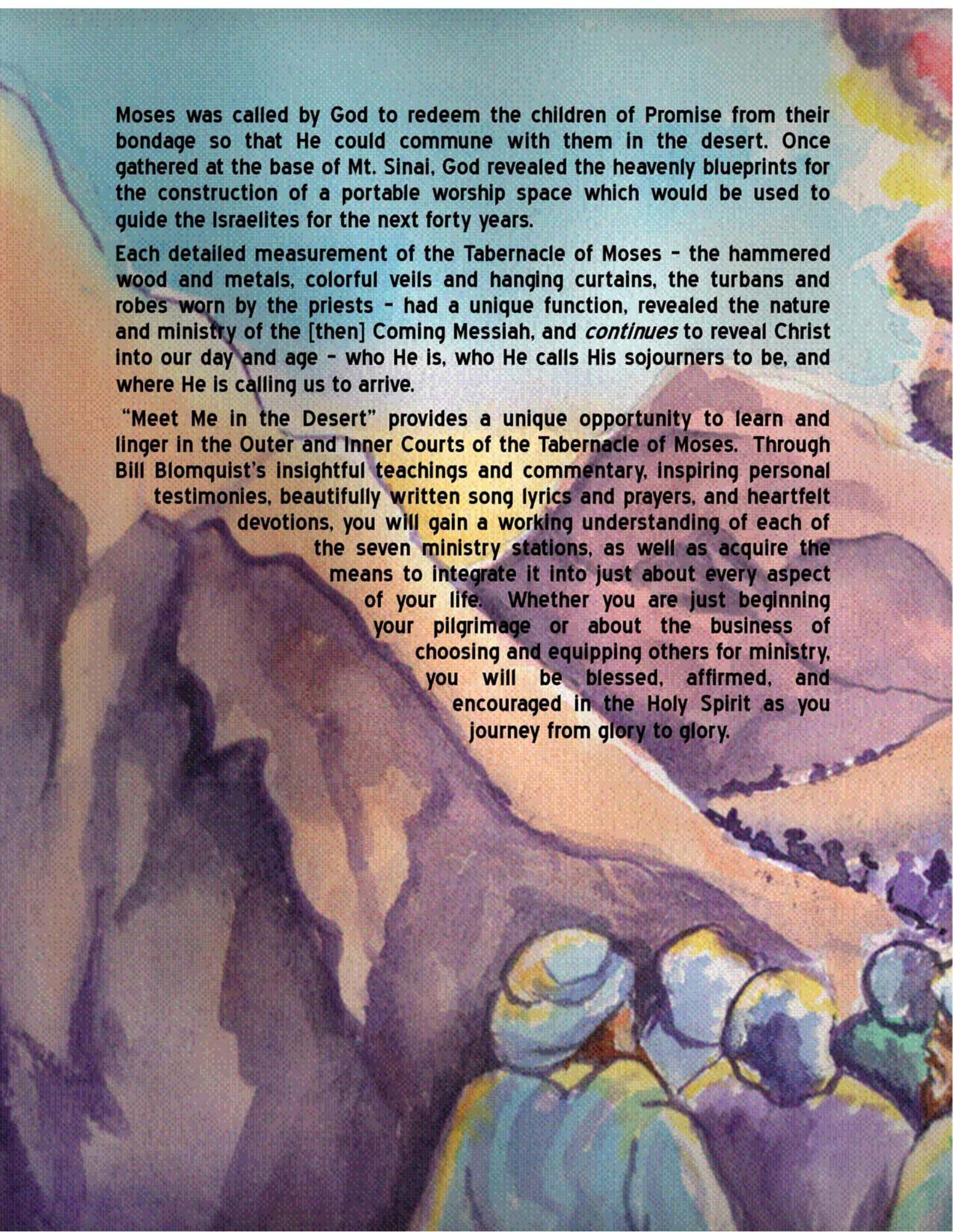
- ❖ Ada R. Habershon, Outline Studies of the Tabernacle, Kregel Publications
- ❖ Kevin J. Conner, The Tabernacle of Moses, KJC Publications
- ❖ Judson Cornwall, Let Us Draw Near, Logos International.

About the Author

The Reverend Bill Blomquist is an Episcopal priest and serves as the Associate Pastor and Worship Leader at Church of the Holy Apostles in Katy, Texas. Bill's passion for the Lord and his desire to spread the gospel are exemplified through his exuberant (and contagious) style and ministry to the Lord. He is an avid Christian songwriter and a fervent promoter of lay ministry and discipleship. Bill and his wife Beverly have been married since 1985 and have two daughters.

Although Bill always knew there was a God, he did not know the saving grace of a personal savior until his early twenties. As a native Floridian and former surfer dude, it is only fitting that Bill gave his life to Christ on a beach while sitting in the sand – sand - just as the Lord had met and delivered the Israelites from the sand in the Sinai desert, so He had met Bill and delivered him from his “desert” on the sands of a Central Florida beach. His is a fascinating story filled with the unfailing love of our most merciful Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. By God's grace, Bill set his heart on Jesus and surrendered himself to walk in His ways.

Bill received his Bachelor of Science degree from Florida Atlantic University, his Masters of Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a degree in Anglican Studies from Trinity Episcopal School. He has been studying the Tabernacle of Moses for more than twenty-five years.



Moses was called by God to redeem the children of Promise from their bondage so that He could commune with them in the desert. Once gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai, God revealed the heavenly blueprints for the construction of a portable worship space which would be used to guide the Israelites for the next forty years.

Each detailed measurement of the Tabernacle of Moses - the hammered wood and metals, colorful veils and hanging curtains, the turbans and robes worn by the priests - had a unique function, revealed the nature and ministry of the [then] Coming Messiah, and *continues* to reveal Christ into our day and age - who He is, who He calls His sojourners to be, and where He is calling us to arrive.

“Meet Me in the Desert” provides a unique opportunity to learn and linger in the Outer and Inner Courts of the Tabernacle of Moses. Through Bill Blomquist’s insightful teachings and commentary, inspiring personal testimonies, beautifully written song lyrics and prayers, and heartfelt devotions, you will gain a working understanding of each of the seven ministry stations, as well as acquire the means to integrate it into just about every aspect of your life. Whether you are just beginning your pilgrimage or about the business of choosing and equipping others for ministry, you will be blessed, affirmed, and encouraged in the Holy Spirit as you journey from glory to glory.