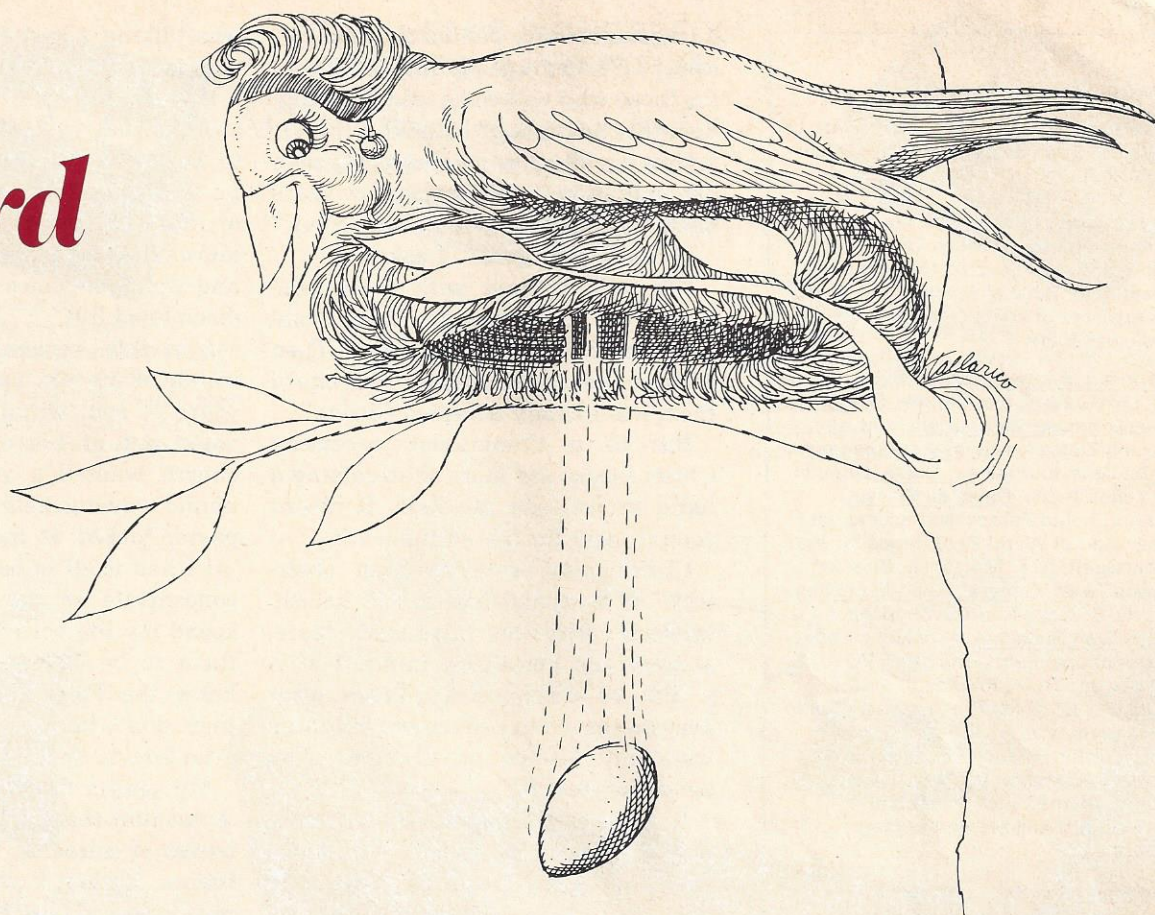


the last word



Jamie Buckingham

SOME OF US HAVE been honestly questioning why we're not seeing more "signs and wonders." It is true that accompanying the new move of the Holy Spirit, there are more miracles, healings and dramatic answers to prayer than this generation has ever seen. But any way you look at it, we're still a long way from the standard set in the book of Acts.

I personally wish we would stop defining people as "charismatics." It's not a New Testament designation. The "charismatics" of today were simply normal Christians in the New Testament. However, one of the weaknesses of those who, in these last days, are moving up to normal Christianity has been the tendency to climb higher before our foundation has been secured.

Jesus said that on judgment day there will be some who say they healed the sick, cast out demons, even performed miracles in his name. Yet they were not Christians because they only *heard* his commandments; they did not practice them personally.

That's heavy teaching. To explain it Jesus talked about the necessity of

putting down a foundation before building a house.

The rock foundation is discipleship.

Jesus also said that for those who believe, signs and wonders would follow. Yet we've taken that statement and gone wild, not realizing it was given as the graduation address after three years of intense training in discipleship.

I believe the reason we're not seeing more "signs and wonders" is we don't have disciples. We're spawning a generation of people who don't have time to wait on the Lord, who don't have time to live disciplined lives. All they want are the miracles, without being willing to pay the price for them.

Before we seek to heal the sick, let's make sure we're personally committed to the Great Physician. Let's make certain that we have repented of our sin, that we have forgiven all our enemies (and friends), that our homes are in divine order, that we are submitted to a local body. Let the disciplines of giving, fasting and praying be established in our personal lives. Then we can move on to signs and wonders.

One of my favorite stories has to do with a mother bird who built a beautiful nest high in a tree. Only the nest had no bottom. When questioned about it the mother said, "Oh, I just love to lay eggs but I hate the responsibility of having to raise babies."

Most of us have been caught in the "soul-winners-syndrome." Jesus, however, never commanded his followers to become soul-winners. Rather he told them to go and make disciples. Discipleship means (1) being responsible to someone else and (2) having someone for whom you are responsible.

Being responsible for someone is far more than soul winning. It means seeing people through. It means sticking with a person—for years if necessary—until he comes into full maturity. It means seeing the potential in a Simon Peter when, even after three years of intense training, he lets you down. We brag about winning thousands. Jesus was satisfied to spend his time with twelve—or three—or one.

I still remember talking with a Christian professor on the campus of
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a large university behind the iron curtain. "Our small group has set a goal for those who will come into the Kingdom this next year," he said.

How vividly I remembered my own denominational goal from a few years back—"A Million More in Fifty Four."

"What's your goal?" I asked.

"Three!" he said with determination. "We are claiming three Communists for Jesus next year." Then with excitement he added, "And one of them has already accepted Christ."

But to a Communist, accepting Christ meant far more than raising a hand or walking an aisle. It meant commitment for life—unto death.

Christianity is more than obstetrics. It is pediatrics, public health, internal medicine, diagnostic care, surgery and geriatrics. In short, it is a life of discipleship. Years after Jesus returned to heaven his followers were still known as disciples. You never outgrow it.

It takes a disciplined life to manifest the power of God. When Jesus said that some healings come only through prayer and fasting, he was not talking about a day of fasting. He

was talking about a way of life. And that takes time. Years.

Beware of the Jesus-is-coming-soon cop-out whereby you don't have to be a disciple because you believe he is coming tomorrow. This is one of Satan's smoke screens, for he knows that the power to perform signs and wonders comes only through the disciplined life.

I vividly remember the pathetic words of my old pastor. After thirty years of soul winning he was being voted out of his congregation. The church wanted a younger, more dynamic "evangelistic" type. The old pastor looked at me sadly and said, "If I had it all to do over I would not concentrate on the masses. I would spend my life with ten men, teaching them to be like Jesus. These people know the Four Spiritual Laws, but they don't know how to forgive, or even how to be kind one to another."

My prayer for the Body of Christ is not that there should be more ministries of miracles, healings or deliverance. Rather, I would hear the commendation of God for our maturity in discipleship. α