

Preface

The engine on my ancient Cessna airplane was purring as I took off from the little grass airstrip near our home in Melbourne, Florida, to fly to Augusta, Georgia. It was a cold, blustery February morning. Other than the noise from the engine and the whistle of the wind past the rattling windows, the cockpit was quiet.

My antique radio had stopped working moments after takeoff. That didn't bother me. I never did trust radio navigation anyway, having learned to fly by the seat of my pants in an old Piper cub on a dirt runway. All I needed was a compass and a map to get me to my destination.

But over south Georgia the ceiling began to drop. I was forced to climb out "on top" — over the clouds. It was beautiful up there, and the flying was smooth. But without landmarks — and without any kind of radio navigation to guide me — I was in critical danger of getting lost. Even though my compass was reliable — inerrant, to use an orthodox word — it gave little help and was basically ineffective without visual contact with the ground. I could be blown miles off course and never know it.

Within minutes I had a distinct sensation that the plane was drifting eastward, out over the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, on one occasion I lined up the nose of the plane on a distant cloud and could actually "see" the plane turning toward Spain. Every instinct said to apply the left rudder to keep from drifting out over the water. I yearned for some contact with the ground, even for some friendly voice through the speaker from a radar operator telling me where I was. It was not enough to know which direction I was pointed — the direction I was moving was the critical factor.

An hour later the clouds began to break. To my horror, I saw water below me. I began an immediate descent, hoping I would not meet someone else coming up through the same hole. Once again I found myself wishing for something more than my compass and basic instruments to give me guidance and direction. The need for "control" beyond my own was vital.

It was not until I broke through the bottom layer of clouds that I discovered the water I had seen was actually the Savannah River. I was off course about 15 miles, but to the left I could see the skyline of my destination and knew that Augusta's Bush Field was nearby.

After I landed and parked the plane on the apron, I was met by an agent from the Federal Aviation Authority who had been in the tower when I came in — sans radio.

"You caused quite a stir up there," he said kindly, "coming in without a radio. We've been watching you on radar for 20 minutes and tried to contact you for landing instructions."

"Sorry," I said. "Mine is broken. Besides, I never have trusted radios. As long as I got that blinking green light from the tower, I figured it was okay to land."

"Things are changing," the inspector said. "It used to be all a pilot needed was a compass and a map. Now aviation has speeded up. Planes are faster and there are a lot more of them in the air. If you're going to fly into a controlled air space — get a good radio."

He paused. "In fact," he said, "I'm not going to let you take off without special permission. Call the tower on the phone when you're ready to leave, and then come out and wait in your plane. They'll signal you with the light when it's clear to taxi."

Then he added, “And don’t come back to Bush Field until you have a functioning radio. This is controlled air space.”

For a number of years I committed myself to the Bible as my compass in life. The radio of the Holy Spirit was a nuisance. It could not be trust. Especially inaccurate, I thought, were messages from those who claimed to have various “gifts” of the Spirit. I preferred to fly by the seat of my pants — good old carnal sense — and stick to the Bible as my sole guide in life.

Now comes additional revelation, oddly, from the Bible itself. The Bible is not enough. In fact, it is ineffective and may even lead you astray unless it is interpreted by the Holy Spirit. I am not talking about “extra-Biblical” revelation. I am simply saying that if the Holy Spirit does not bring life to the written Word, the Bible at best is nothing more than beautiful literature. At worst it is bondage-producing legalism. Jesus, as reflected in John’s Gospel, and Paul in his letters to the new Christian churches have much to say about this.

The Bible is known as the *logos* — the written word. But there is another word, equally important, known as the *rhema*. This is the “now word” of God to each individual. It is what brings the Bible alive. It is what makes the Bible meaningful to each individual life. It is the word of the Holy Spirit.

To say all a Christian needs is the Bible is an orthodox-evangelical fallacy which has been fostered upon us by generations of people who feared we might be pulled off course if we listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Christian needs to check every voice against the Bible’s infallible direction. But to live by the Bible alone means your doctrinal nose could be pointing true north while your entire life is moving out over the ocean. You’ll never realize how critical your situation is until you run out of gas and have to ditch at sea — or you’re hit from behind by a jet liner full of singing charismatics.

My friend, Bernie May, has a twin-engine Beechcraft that is full of sophisticated radio gear. Several weeks ago he flew down from his home in Waxhaw, North Carolina, and picked up our family to fly us back north for a skiing weekend. We left Melbourne early in the morning in a driving rain and were in rain, fog and severe turbulence all the way to our destination. But flying in bad weather is no problem to Bernie — because of all those navigation aids. He took his direction from the tower, found his course on his compass; climbed to his assigned altitude and set the automatic pilot. From that point on, the radio — and the compass, working together — flew us safely to our destination.

That’s what this book is all about. Balance. And the joy — and the risk — of the Spirit-controlled life. It is a book about the necessary venture — often tough, sometimes joyful, always fulfilling — that the believer must take to reach that life beyond his own control. The life in the Spirit.

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Chapter 1

The Breath of God

“Watch the eagle,” our Israeli guide said, pointing high above the Sinai desert at the silent figure, soaring close to the mountains. “He locks his wings, picks the thermals and rides the breath of God above the storm.”

I was on a research trip in the Sinai Peninsula, collecting material for a book on the wilderness experience. For seven days our small group of men had been trekking the desert sand, making our way through the awesome wadis (dried riverbeds) and climbing the rugged stone mountains in the footsteps of Moses. Now we had reached Jebel Musa, the Mountain of Moses. Struggling in the darkness, we had climbed the backside of Mount Sinai to reach the summit by dawn. Now we were on our descent, following the steep path downward toward St. Catherine’s Monastery, nestled far below against the base of the huge mountain.

It was then we spotted the eagle.

A huge storm, one of those rare phenomena of the desert, had built up over the Gulf of Suez and was now moving inland. The mighty thunderheads towered around 30,000 feet. It was awesome to behold as it moved to the south of us across the triangular-shaped peninsula toward Saudi Arabia where it would doubtless dissipate.

But it was the eagle which drew the attention of our guide. We were near the summit of the 7,600-foot mountain, and the eagle was already 10,000 feet above us. And climbing.

“That’s what the prophet meant when he said God’s people would mount up with wings as eagles,” the tough, dark-skinned Israeli said as he squatted on the pathway, waiting for the rest of the men to catch up. I squatted down beside him, Bedouin fashion, and together we watched the eagle confront the massive storm clouds.

“How high will he go?” I asked.

“Over and around the storm. Perhaps fifteen, twenty thousand feet. He is now beyond his own control. He locks his wings, here,” he said — pointing at his shoulders — “and rides the wind of God.”

Again he used that magnificent Hebrew word *ruach* to describe the thermals of the desert. It was the same word King David used in Psalm 51 to describe the Holy Spirit — the breath of God. “Take not thy *ruach* from me.”

In the New Testament the word is softer, more gentle. There we find the Greek word *pneuma*; meaning breath or spirit. It is the same word from which we get “pneumatic.” In the New Testament it is often used to describe a filling experience. So the Holy Spirit fills, much as one would blow air into a balloon. The thought is one of lifting — from within. But in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God, the *ruach*, is anything but gentle. Here it is a roaring wind, howling through the canyons and moaning over the mountains. It is the mighty winds of the storms blowing across the wilderness accompanied by flashing lightning and rumbling thunder. It is the hot air thermals rushing upward. And upon it rides the eagle,

ascending to unbelievable heights, using the air currents which destroy things on the ground to carry him over the fury of the storm to safety on the other side.

I watched, fascinated, as the eagle circled and ascended until he was but a tiny dot against the onrushing storm. Then he disappeared altogether.

“He fears nothing,” the guide said as we rose to greet the other men coming down the steep path. “Even though we no longer see him, he can see us. He can see for 50 miles. He will go so high he may be covered with frost — his head, his wings, everything. Then he descends on the backside of the storm and the frost melts. Who knows, if it were not for the ice, he might just keep going up, touch God and never come down.”

Our guide grinned, stretched and padded off barefooted down the rocky mountain trail.

It’s interesting how I keep thinking of that eagle — and the breath of God upon which he rides. I think of him when storm clouds approach. I think of him when it seems I’m being swept, beyond control, to some dizzy encounter. I think of his determination, in the face of impossible odds, to lock his wings so that nothing can deter him from his upward climb. I think of him, even now, as I start work on this book.

It has been a dozen years since I had that exhilarating experience the Bible describes as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I wrote about that experience, and the many lessons learned from it, in my earlier book *Risky Living*. For a while I was able to stay spiritually airborne on the enthusiasm alone. “Enthusiasm,” by the way, comes from two Greek words, *en theos*, meaning “in God.” But if the Christian walk is mere enthusiasm, we become nothing more than spiritual grasshoppers, going up and down but never learning how to soar. I need more than being “in God”; I must have God in me. Once airborne, I need some power to keep me aloft.

It was then I discovered there was more to the Christian life than living on experiences. Being born again is an experience. Being healed is an experience. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is an experience. But if the experience does not open the door to an ongoing process, then we soon fall to earth again — battered, flattened, and often in worse shape than when we made our upward leap.

Conversion — turning your back on a self-centered way of life and allowing Jesus Christ to take total control — is an experience. But a man needs more than conversion, he needs salvation, which is an ongoing process. Salvation, in its truest sense, is becoming who we really are. And that process is never complete — at least not here on this earth.

Healing is an experience, and I am so grateful that thousands of people are experiencing divine healing in their bodies. I am grateful the healing ministry is once again being recognized by the church as a valid experience. I am grateful that in liturgical and evangelical churches alike, men and women are discovering that one of the purposes of the redemption was not only to save us from sin but to save us from sickness. The same Jesus who healed 2,000 years ago is alive and, through His Holy Spirit, still healing bodies. But while divine healing is an experience, it is not enough. The people of God must move upward to the ongoing process of divine health. And that, like the process of salvation, demands, discipline, exercise, determination and the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, when we come to the ministry of the Holy Spirit — as we will in this book — we find the same concepts. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience. For many of us it was an exhilarating,

revolutionary experience. It opened our eyes to understand the Bible. It was the instrument which allowed us to call Jesus lord in all areas of our lives. It brought freedom from the bondage of legalism and set in motion the various charismatic gifts which had laid dormant ever since the Holy Spirit first entered at conversion. But while the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience, the Spirit-controlled life is an ongoing process. It consists not only of allowing the breath of God (*pneuma*) to fill and expand you to the proper size and shape, but it consists of allowing the wind of God (*ruach*) to bear you aloft — and keep you there. The *ruach* not only controls your path of flight in the face of oncoming storms, but He enables you to soar the exalted corridors of heaven and brush your wings against the face of God.

There are certain things you must do, however, before that is possible. For one, you must recognize who you are. You are an eagle, not a grasshopper. Then you must be willing to cooperate with God, to put yourself in takeoff position for God to fill — and send you soaring. To remain on your nest when the storm blows is disastrous. Your only hope is to launch out in faith against all insurmountable obstacles, lock your wings and let God do the rest. That's the reason I'm writing this book. To take you with me on some of my own flights (and some of my mountain-smashing experiences). I am writing to encourage you to soar like the eagle: be filled with the Holy Spirit and ride the wind of God.